

# **HARDY'S NARRATIVE ART : TECHNIQUE AND STRATEGY IN SELECTED NOVELS**

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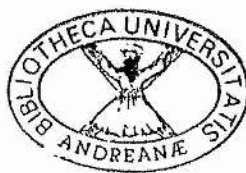
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Technique and Strategy in Selected Novels**

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M.Phil.





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## DECLARATIONS

(i) I, Barbara Liaci, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 46000 words in length, has been written by me, that is the record of work carried out by me and that has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

22<sup>nd</sup> May, 1995

(ii) I was admitted as a research student in January 1994 and as a candidate for the degree of M.Phil. in October 1994; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 1994 and 1995.

22<sup>nd</sup> May, 1995

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## ABSTRACT

The work is a study of Thomas Hardy's novels and their pervasively *indefinite* quality. It is focused upon five Wessex novels and the author's narrative choices.

Each chapter is devoted to the textual analysis of a different novel with the common purpose of discovering Hardy's alternation between a definite and indefinite image of reality.

The argument is that Hardy opposed the Victorian need to stereotype human beings, especially women, and tried to declare, though very quietly, their freedom from any type of categorization.

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## PREFACE

In this study of Thomas Hardy, I have used the World's Classics edition for all the novels I have analysed.

I have also chosen to underline words or sentences which, taken as quotations from Hardy's books, have been of particular importance for the exposition of my ideas. Except where otherwise indicated, all such emphases are my own.

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to explore Thomas Hardy's attempt at defining reality. Any author in any age tries to make of his or her work a mirror to that society. Hardy's reality was that of the late-Victorian world, with its multiple contradictions, frustrations, discoveries, and a consequent deep-rooted tendency to fix and label both people and experiences into rigid categories.

It is very common in human experiences of any kind to look for certainties when we feel ourselves losing our usual supporting ideas and habits. And this was one of the many reactions that the Victorians undertook. They were painfully experiencing the collapse of a systemized world where everything was given a purposeful place, where traditional relations among things and people were respected and recognized. They were presented instead with the rising of a completely new world, whose aspects were absolutely revolutionary for them.<sup>1</sup>

An understandable tendency was, therefore, to reset the various aspects of life into both new and old categories and to pretend that this new system was the *natural* order of things. Categories of different kinds, in fact, dominated Victorian life and still shape most of our twentieth-century response to moral, sexual, and religious issues, with the Victorians playing a fundamental role as ideological guides for us, who are their most direct heirs.

As long ago as 1889 Edward Carpenter wrote the following ironic words on scientific power to discover the truth about the world:

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<sup>1</sup>The final decades of the nineteenth-century saw a deep alteration of the pattern of life with the introduction of technologies like the phonograph, the wireless, the moving pictures, the bicycle, the telephone, the motor car, and the airplane. See Asa Briggs, *Victorian Things*, (London, 1988).

'Some day perhaps, when all this showy vesture of scientific theory (which has this peculiarity that only the learned can see it) has been quasi-completed, and Humanity is expected to walk solemnly forth in its new garment for all the world to admire -- as in Andersen's story of the Emperor's New Clothes -- some little child standing on a door-step will cry out: "But he has got nothing on at all", and amid some confusion it will be seen that the child is right'.

Despite the criticism of Carpenter<sup>2</sup>, among others, modern science has played a major role in the creation of such categories, for the numerous and revolutionary scientific discoveries of the period influenced the constitution of an authoritative and superior class of men, with a recognized right to define, categorize, and group the rest of society.<sup>3</sup> Though the scientific mind wanted to lead Victorians towards clarity, on the contrary, it led their ideas towards confusion: women, the disabled, homosexuals,<sup>4</sup> criminals, madmen, children and people of different races became objects of studies and experiments. They were attentively examined as interesting cases of deviation from normality, which was represented by the white, physically and mentally sane, heterosexual adult Englishman. 'Degeneration' became a frequent word among natural and medical scientists, together with 'evolution', 'regression', 'reform', 'atavism', and 'decline'.<sup>5</sup> If Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection had initially invited the conclusion that the

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<sup>2</sup>See E. Carpenter, *Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure*, (London, 1889), p.81.

<sup>3</sup>The medical science obtained 'social power' since 'experts shaped a medical discourse that spoke to all those problems in comprehensible language, which appeared to many contemporaries to be an accurate portrayal of the world'. See Robert A. Nye, *Crime, Madness and Politics in Modern France: The Medical Concept of National Decline*, (Princeton University Press, 1948), pp.47-8.

<sup>4</sup>For Richard von Krafft-Ebing (*Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886)), one influential writer on the subject, homosexuality was a hereditary neuropathic or psychopathic tendency.

<sup>5</sup>In Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Angel Clare sees Tess as the product of a degenerate family: "I cannot help associating your decline as a family with this other fact...of your want of firmness. Decrepit families imply decrepit wills, decrepit conduct", Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, p.229. The survival of family traditions, the rise and decay of families, and the idea of *pedigree* became one of the most obsessive interests 'of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie', an obsession which took the form of 'biological, medical, or eugenic precepts'. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol.I, (Harmondsworth, 1981).

evolutionary process was undoubtedly progressive,<sup>6</sup> Darwin and his followers began later to suggest the possibility of regression more than progression.<sup>7</sup> Inherited, given characteristics,<sup>8</sup> which had won out over weaker ones in the natural battle of selection, were not necessarily the best ones from the moral point of view, so the alterations in man and the world were not always for the betterment of the human species.<sup>9</sup>

It seemed to the late Victorians that a *deviant* species of man was coming into existence, and this constituted the most horrifying threat.<sup>10</sup> Poverty, disease, femaleness, homosexuality, criminality, and madness were all causes as well as effects of degeneration; *alienated* states of mind, social positions, sexes, health, and behaviours were all seen as forms of deviation from the socially constituted norm accepted and respected by most nineteenth-century men.

The belief in degeneration brought people to panic and to think about the imminent decadence of their era, and of the world in general. Max Nordau's *Degeneration*,<sup>11</sup> for instance,

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<sup>6</sup>See C. Darwin and A.R. Wallace, *Evolution by Natural Selection*, (Cambridge, 1958). 'There is a [simple] grandeur in this view of life...that from so simple an origin, through the selection of infinitesimal varieties, endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been evolved' (these lines also concluded *The Origin of the Species*). See also Herbert Spencer: '...Progress is not an accident, not a thing within human control, but a beneficent necessity'. *Essays on Education & Kindred Subjects by Herbert Spencer*, edited by C.W. Eliot, (London, 1911), p.195.

<sup>7</sup>This was a very deeply felt problem, and many tried to contrast the alarmist notes with *consoling scientific* results. See, for example, Hugh Percy Dunn, 'Is our Race Degenerating?', *The Nineteenth Century*, vol.XXXVI, (1894), pp.301-14; or Frances Power Cobbe, 'What Is Progress, and Are We Progressing?', *Fortnightly Review*, vol.I, (new series), (1867), pp.357-70: '...could we close our eyes to the growth of commercial corruption and dishonesty, we might look cheerfully and confidently, if not with the romantic hope of 1851, on almost all the conditions of our national Virtue and national Happiness', p.370.

<sup>8</sup>'No one, before my father, had ever recognised in the criminal an abnormal being driven by an irresistible atavistic impulse to commit anti-social acts, but many had observed...the existence of certain individuals, nearly always members of degenerate families, who seemed from their earliest infancy to be prompted by some fatal impulse to do evil to their fellow-men'. This is the very beginning of Chapter II, 'The Born Criminal and His Relation to Moral Insanity and Epilepsy', by Cesare Lombroso, *Criminal Man*, (New York, 1911), p.52.

<sup>9</sup>Hardy himself was interested in these new themes and participated openly in the discussion with 'The Tree of Knowledge', *New Review*, 10, (1894), pp.675-90. He was also a member of The Savile Club (from 1878 to 1909) together with Herbert Spencer, George Romanes, and Henry Maudsley.

<sup>10</sup>The subject of heredity is inseparable from questions of gender. It was the woman (often in her role as mother) who seemed to have carried the burden of anxiety or guilt on the subject'; see William Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel 1880-1940*, (Cambridge, 1994), p.165.

<sup>11</sup>Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, (London, 1920).



spoke of the end of civilization in biblical terms, yet he derived his convictions from medical science, in a context where Francis Galton, C.W. Saleeby, Havelock Ellis, Karl Pearson (Professor of Eugenics at University College London from 1911), August Weismann, Henry Maudsley, and others were all working upon the eugenic renewal of the world.<sup>12</sup>

Their solution was very simple and radical: the 'better elements' of the human species should be maintained and allowed to develop, while the 'worse ones' should be eliminated with a consequent betterment of the world. Of course, the following history of racism in Europe took its first step from this position, where 'better elements' became easily and rapidly associated with the white race in opposition to all the others.<sup>13</sup>

Yet, apart from imperialistic and racial consequences, this tendency to discriminate between different, opposite elements in life helped Hardy's contemporaries to the creation of a *standard*, which represented the accepted normal behaviour, a category in contrasting relations to different ones, which were all thought of as forms of deviation and, consequently, instances of degeneration. Being poor, mad, criminal,<sup>14</sup> homosexual, unhealthy, or a woman implied exclusion from this standard, from a norm which had been agreed on by a majority of people influenced by medical readings, and public conformity.

The socially and historically built category of standard, however, began to appear as a solution to some late nineteenth-century dilemmas together with a *double-standard*.

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<sup>12</sup>See *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development*, (London, 1883) and *Essays in Eugenics*, (London, 1909) by F. Galton; C.W. Saleeby, *The Methods of Race-regeneration*, (London, 1911); H. Hellis, *The Problem of Race-regeneration*, (London, 1911); *Essays upon Heredity by August Weismann*, edited by E.B. Poulton and A.E. Shipley, vol.II, (Oxford, 1892); the following works by Karl Pearson: *The Groundwork of Eugenics*, (London, 1909); *Darwinism, Medical Progress and Eugenics*, (London, 1912); *The Problem of Practical Eugenics*, (London, 1912).

<sup>13</sup>'It may be quite true that some negroes are better than some white men; but no rational man, cognisant of the facts, believes that the average negro is the equal, still less superior, of the average white man', *Lectures and Lay Sermons by Thomas Huxley*, edited by Ernest Rhys, (London, 1910), p.115.

<sup>14</sup>'These individuals, who were sometimes treated as lunatics, sometimes as diseased persons, and sometimes as criminals, were said by the earliest observers to be afflicted with moral insanity'. For a full account of the association of criminality to insanity, see Cesare Lombroso, *op. cit.*, p.52. Another detailed study on crime was W.D. Morrison, *Crime and its Causes*, (London, 1891).

This was the application of two different, contrasting, and sometimes opposite systems of values for different human categories; and the best exemplification of it is represented by the Victorian concern with women.<sup>15</sup>

Victorians, in fact, developed their own standards of femininity, their own ideal models, on which basis they were accustomed to judge, compare, and condemn what was thought to be different.<sup>16</sup> There were two dominating female images, the *madonna* and the *prostitute*, where the first represented a rigorous sexual abstinence in marked contrast with the oldest profession of the second.<sup>17</sup> The madonna-type was best pictured by two well-known intellectuals of the time; Ruskin in 'Of Queens' Gardens', and Coventry Patmore with his 'Angel in the House'. They both participated in the enthusiastic diffusion of a woman type, which is still recognized and welcomed today by a majority of people.

Women soon became one of the main points of discussion for the times. The 'New Woman', as late Victorians called her, was '...young, educated, intelligent, emancipated in ideas and morality, resistant to the conventional notion of marriage and maternity as the goal of any normal female's progress.'<sup>18</sup> 'New Woman' was a 1890s term but by this definition Mary Wollstonecraft,<sup>19</sup> Mona Caird, and Millicent Garrett Fawcett, were all 'new' and challenging, with their individual less or more radical choices and viewpoints.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Degeneration was, of course, readily associated to women, since it was assumed to be their own fault, as mothers, if the human genre was seen *progressively* retrogressing. Thomas Huxley, for instance, said: 'And we fear that so long as this potential motherhood is her lot, woman will be found to be fearfully weighed in the race of life', *op. cit.*, p.120.

<sup>16</sup>A useful reference is Rosemarie Morgan, *Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*, (London, 1988). This book is a revisionary study of Hardy's treatment of female sexuality.

<sup>17</sup>Among the many literary works of the period celebrating the advent of the 'New Woman', Shaw's *Mrs Warren Profession* (1894) seems to suggest a controversial reading of the whore. Other fictional and dramatic examples on this line are: Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879, but first performed in London in 1889); Mona Caird's *The Daughters of Danaus* (1894); Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did* (1895); Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* (1893); and *Keynotes* (1893) by 'George Egerton' (Mary Clairmonte).

<sup>18</sup>See Cedric Watts, 'Hardy's Sue Bridehead and the "New Woman"', *Critical Survey*, 5, no. 2, (1993), pp.152-6.

<sup>19</sup>See Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), for a late-eighteenth century view against wife-and-mother stereotype.

<sup>20</sup>Some of them were more radically feminists than others; Mona Caird, for instance, was an impassioned activist and anti-marriage campaigner (see her article on 'The

One of the most interesting voices crying in defence of women's rights was J.S. Mill in his *The Subjection of Women* (1869). Here, he explored the principle of perfect equality between man and woman, and invited his readers to take the necessary steps towards both an educational opportunity and equity in admission to the professions.<sup>21</sup> Despite his brilliant exposition of these problems, and the first admission of female students to Queen's College London in 1848, and to Bedford College a year later, the Suffrage Bill, asserting the right of women finally to take part in the elections, was blocked by Parliament in 1870. It was not until more than forty years later, in 1918, that British women gained the vote, but even then the success was confined to only those over thirty.

Another mostly controversial problem related to women's place in society was that of marriage, divorce, and property, which Hardy frequently analysed not only through his literary works but also in his notebooks and with more direct interventions in the debate.<sup>22</sup> The same women were divided among themselves on this question; some of them, in fact, were more emancipated (Mona Caird, Olive Schreiner who had written an essay on hysteria for a *Dictionary of Psychological Medicine*, George Eliot, George Sand), and in favour of a free sexual union with no limiting contract of marriage, while others like Kathlyn Oliver and Christabel Pankhurst defended the same sexual abstinence on which the madonna-type had been built.<sup>23</sup>

The legal position of women in marriage constituted another much discussed problem of the times, since before 1857, the year of the Matrimonial Causes Act, divorce was,

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Morality of Marriage', *The Fortnightly Review*, cclxxix, pp.310-30), while, on the other extreme, Millicent Garrett Fawcett represented a more liberal and less radical fringe of feminists who still referred to marriage as woman's highest vocation.

<sup>21</sup>See *Essays on Equality, Law, and Education by John Stuart Mill*, edited by J.M. Robson, (Toronto, 1984), University of Toronto Press.

<sup>22</sup>For a sustained exposition, see Phillip Mallett, 'Women and Marriage in Victorian Society', in *Marriage and Property*, edited by E.M. Craik, (Aberdeen, 1984), pp.159-189.

<sup>23</sup>Another voice against a union sanctified by marriage is William Blake, who, as early as 1794, condemned 'the marriage hearse' ('London', in *Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, edited by G. Keynes, (London, 1956), p.75).

for a woman, not only extremely difficult to obtain, but also so expensive as to dissuade any courageous wife. After the Act of Parliament in 1857, it became easier to divorce, though the law was again based on the assumption of a double-standard for men and women. Women, in fact, had to demonstrate their husbands' incestuous adultery, rape, act of sodomy, bestiality, adultery coupled with cruelty or desertion, while mere adultery was enough to divorce a wife.<sup>24</sup>

A second but not secondary problem was that of property, since everything that a wife possessed passed into the hands of her husband with their marriage.<sup>25</sup> Yet what was more, women could not have back their wealth after divorce because property had become their husbands' possession forever. Women obtained the legal right to retain their own property only in 1870 and 1882 with the passing of the two Married Women's Property Acts.

This disparity of treatment was, of course, based on the idea that women would be sexually more restrained than men, because of their less-developed sexual appetite. Only abnormal, diseased, and insane women were thought to have a sexual drive, while healthy women had not: this was an idea shared by most men of science in Victorian times, who collaborated in the assimilation of the female world to that of other weaker categories of human beings.<sup>26</sup>

Insanity, femininity, racial and national differences, therefore, all represented deviations from the norm, which, though ideologically built, was given as *natural*. Women, for instance, were thought to belong to a *naturally* different category from men; their brain size was studied and weighed

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<sup>24</sup>In his essay 'On Marriage' John Stuart Mill states: 'When women were merely slaves, to give them a permanent hold upon their masters was a first step towards their elevation. That step is now complete: and in the progress of civilization, the time has come when women may aspire to something more than merely find a protector', J.S. Mill, *op. cit.*, p.49.

<sup>25</sup>Except property in the form of freehold land, and property protected by a marriage settlement.

<sup>26</sup>See Dr William Acton, *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs in Childhood, Youth, Adult Age, and Advanced Life Considered in their Physiological, Social, and Moral Relations*, (London, 1857), and W.R. Greg, 'Prostitution', *Westminster Review*, liii, (1850).



in comparison with that of the male species which represented the norm;<sup>27</sup> they were assumed to possess innate differential qualities as female representatives, as beings lacking the characteristic male elements. They were supposed to be more intuitive and more imaginative than rational, and these qualities were absolutely secondary in an era when science and its 'indubitable' rules had found their dominion. Women had been created exclusively for child-bearing and house-keeping, they had to preserve themselves from any other occupation in order not to run the risk of sterility or that of denying their husbands a warm and safe familiar nest. No woman could survive outside the sweet walls of her family's house.<sup>28</sup>

In this extremely confused world where categorization represented the way out, the only possibility left to an exceptional writer like Hardy, sensitive to questions of heredity, to scientific debates and controversies since the 1870s (as his notebooks show), was that of developing a strategy to communicate his doubts about an easy interpretation of reality, of the kind his contemporaries seemed eager to accept.<sup>29</sup> Yet this strategy, to be effective, had to be secret otherwise he would have incurred Mrs Grundy's censorship, and he concealed his radicalism behind a nostalgic celebration of the golden rural past of

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<sup>27</sup>See Alexander Sutherland, 'Woman's Brain', *Nineteenth Century*, vol. XLVII, (1900), pp.802-10: 'The woman's brain is always less than the man's' (p.806); 'It is a physiological fact with which I meant alone to deal, and the figures seem to me to show that the male brain has an advantage in size of about 10 per cent' (p.810). For other voices on the same subject, see W.L. Distant, 'On the Mental Differences between the Sexes', *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, vol. IV, (1874), pp.78-87; or J. McGrigor Allan, 'On the Real Differences in the Minds of Men and Women', *The Anthropological Review*, vol. VII, (1869), pp.cxcvi-ccxix.

<sup>28</sup>For late-Victorians, women had to sanctify themselves completely to motherhood. In an article of the time by Arabella Kenealy ('Women as an Athlete', *The Nineteenth Century*, (1899), pp.636-45), we read: '...it may be said that an individual generates a certain daily fund of energy, which if he exceeds one day he must suffer for the next in impoverished vitality, or meet...by drawing upon and deteriorating his constitutional capital' (p.637). Then at the end of the article: '...the first care of Intelligent Motherhood will be to see that none of those powers which belong to her highest development and through her to the highest development of the race shall be impoverished, debased, or misapplied' (p.645).

<sup>29</sup>'...he [Hardy] accepted (albeit with increasing reluctance) the constraints placed upon him by editors, and resorted to strategies of subterfuge which allowed his texts to address controversial and sensitive themes -- now advancing into dangerous territory, now withdrawing to more familiar ground...' (William Greenslade, *op. cit.*, p.6).

the English nation, either through a direct representation of that lost world, as in *Under the Greenwood Tree* and, to a lesser extent, in *The Woodlanders*, or through the clash of the modern with the old, as in the other major novels.

Thomas Hardy thus became, for his contemporaries and not only for them, the model for a rural narrative tradition, made of detailed and realistic representations of farm workers' life, traditions and language. Wessex was transformed, by the imaginative reader, into a lost golden place, where people could still live in harmony with nature and themselves, a place and time before Victorian steam engines, railways, and doubts.

At the end of his career as a novelist, he had gained fame and honours in a period of diffused Grundyism, because of his ability to communicate his unsettling messages to the reader without openly announcing them, using instead a variety of narrative choices to forward a revolutionary process. And this communicative understanding between Hardy and his sensitive readers happens to be one of the most extraordinary discoveries in his novels, where he uses different fictional strategies to induce in us his own views of the world.

One of the most used among the author's strategies is the almost obsessive use of different *points of view*, from which to watch, spy, and sometimes judge an episode, or a character on the narrative scene. The main effect of this use is an *unsettlement* of all categories built up by Victorian contemporaries; when an event or a person is, in fact, viewed and interpreted by different and contrasting voices, it is given an image, which though it can appear more complete, cannot be taken as definitive. Hardy's narrative world, therefore, shows his readers that reality cannot be restrained within culturally-created categories: his women, his poor or diseased people, and children are given finally a chance to be *individuals*, not exemplary exponents of a unifying and, therefore, anonymous category.

Both textual analysis and historical context have been taken into consideration in this study. An attentive analysis of a Hardyan narrative text is a very effective means to discover the author's intentions and the strategies employed to convey a particular meaning to his readers. Only through a detailed and precise observation of narrative recurrences, images, voices, and symbols is it possible to note Hardy's particular uses of fictional devices. Through the repetition of some words as in *Jude* ('spot' and 'circle', for instance), or of images as in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (the idea of a double), through different narrative voices and points of view, as in *The Return*, and different narrative discourses as in *Tess* and in *The Mayor*, we can see emerging a submerged Hardyan secret code to give voice to his personal opinions about the Victorian world.

Despite the central place given to the direct analysis of the texts, the historical and social background of those works has been largely considered. The idea of dealing exclusively with a text, finding all its answers and motivations within its restricted world, has been rejected as illusory. An author writes within a personal and historical context, and he mostly writes to send a message, which is received by a public of people who operate in a similar or different context. A complete and satisfactory analysis cannot be achieved, therefore, without a harmonious fusion of these two components: a rigorous textual analysis and a precise reference to a historical context.

This study is limited to five novels by Hardy. The choice of these narrative examples over others, which have been excluded, has been mainly due to a matter of personal taste. Each of the following chapters will contain an analysis of the text of a different novel. The order chosen is chronological: from *A Pair of Blue Eyes* to *The Return of the Native*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* to end with *Jude the Obscure*, the last and most strategically elaborate of Hardy's fictional works.

*A Pair of Blue Eyes* concentrates on an image of duality which is present throughout the novel. It presents two pairs of lovers with their contrasting and complementary temperaments, their stories, illusions, fantastic projections and desperate disillusion. It is a story of manifestations of young love, written by a young Hardy, who is, nevertheless, able to build up a narrative construction of great value, where symbols and opposing couples of values, people, lives and situations play a large part.

An image which is fundamental for an interpretation of this early novel seems to be that of a mirror, since both characters and situations are mirrored by parallel elements, as in a real specular relation of identical, yet opposed identities. Hardy's representation becomes, therefore, not an artistic mirror to nature, but a symbolic game of reflecting images, where nobody can be assured about a true interpretation of reality.

*A Pair of Blue Eyes* is an early, and in some respects, still immature example of Hardy's narrative, yet it shows a first attempt at communicating the author's belief in the impossibility of putting reality and truth about life into limited boundaries. Through the use of symbolic recurrent images, the young Hardy tries to produce something completely different from his very first attempts at novel writing (*Under the Greenwood Tree*); there is no nostalgic celebration of a past rural world here in this work, but the already mature experience of the coexistence of multiple reflecting images and interpretations of reality.

In *The Return of the Native*, the novelty consists in Hardy's presentation of a kind of unresolved narrative, that is, a fictional world with no precise and determined ending in the Victorian tradition, and, at the same time, in the representation of the uniqueness of Eustacia's tragedy through the analysis of different observers in the story. If the first point is developed through the examination of the novel's double ending, that is, a finale open to more than one single interpretation, the second one is devoted to one of Hardy's heroines, Eustacia Vye. She, in fact, seems to



dominate the fictional world of this novel, mainly by becoming the object of observation of numerous observers, both internal and external to the story narrated.

The narrator, a 'cosmopolitan narrator', an imaginative observer who appears in the pages of the book, the Egdon community, and Eustacia herself, all represent points of view in this tiny part of Wessex. Through this multiple perspective, therefore, Hardy tries to suggest the difficulty of categorising reality, as it appears impossible to label and restrict the character of Eustacia, who is, at the end of the novel, still an undefinable figure, and whose death is deliberately left open to opposite interpretations. The woman's life and tragedy is presented as unique,<sup>30</sup> in opposition to the recurrent Victorian ideas about women and a too easy categorization of them; the story's different observers of Eustacia represent the many possibilities of interpretation of a single element, person and aspect of life. Hardy chooses his heroine, therefore, to show his deep conviction of the impossibility of defining reality as his Victorian contemporaries were optimistically doing.

If Eustacia is an undefinable and fugitive female being, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* gives centrality to the male character of Michael Henchard and his tragic experience of life. Yet it is clear that this hero does not represent the Victorian *standard* man, for from the opening episode of his wife's sale, he shows the intolerant and arrogant temperament of a man independent of any moral restriction dictated by his society.

The chapter will deal, in particular, with the balanced contrast between *diegetic* and *mimetic* elements in the novel, with the consequent representation of a dual narrative

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<sup>30</sup>It is very interesting to read an article by H.G. Wells on the idea of uniqueness and scientific power to discover the truth about life: 'The Rediscovery of the Unique is the rediscovery of a quite obvious and altogether neglected common fact' (p.106); and he continues: 'Science is a match that man has just got alight. He thought he was in a room...and that his light would be reflected from and display walls inscribed with wonderful secrets and pillars carved with philosophical systems wrought into harmony. It is a curious sensation, now that the preliminary splutter is over and the flame burns up clear, to see his hands lit and just a glimpse of himself and the patch he stands on visible, and around him, in place of all that human comfort and beauty he anticipated -- darkness still' (p.111), ('The Rediscovery of the Unique', *Fortnightly Review*, vol.L (1891), pp.106-111.

situation: an *authorial* one, where the author communicates his personal interpretation of the world, watching his characters from outside the narrative he has created, and a *figural* one, where the narrator belongs to the fictional world of the story with a limited knowledge of the happenings.

Hardy's strategy, in this case, will consist in an alternate use of the two different and opposite narrative situations, in an attempt to unsettle the reader of his novel and, at the same time, communicate to him his firm refusal to fix reality. Michael Henchard is a tragic hero and cannot correspond to the typical Victorian male standard, based on the conventional moral choices of sharing common ideas and forms of behaviour. His character cannot be easily defined, any more than Eustacia's before or Tess's later; he illustrates, therefore, his creator's defiance of the narrative act of exhibiting human beings within a restricted and claustrophobic *categorical* distinction between good and bad.

The same alternation between authorial and figural narrative situation is represented in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, the subject of chapter five. In this novel, Tess, as Henchard had done in *The Mayor*, represents the main character, the one towards whom the narrator and author's care and attention are most devoted. She is a woman doomed to be labelled and fixed into a rigid moral category both by the people around her and Victorian readers. Yet Hardy, her creator, spends all his energy in an attempt to free the heroine from this potential framework, by denying a pre-fixed image of her being, and presenting, on the other hand, a radically different and surprising woman.

If with Michael Henchard this process of refusing to offer a definitive characterization had been easier, because the hero was a male character, and, therefore, unlikely to be tied to a restricted human classification, Tess represents a greater challenge for Hardy because she is a woman, and more than this, a Victorian woman. Tess will be presented, throughout the novel, as an indistinct being by means of an

alternate use of an authorial narrator who judges, comments and, most of the time, defends the heroine, and a mimetic narrative where the characters introduce themselves on the scene in mutual contradictions.

Hardy's reader, therefore, will feel confused about a complete and final definition of Tess and the other characters of the story; he or she will receive different and contrasting images of them, both through the narrator's intervention (authorial narrative situation) and the characters' subjective perceptions of themselves and of the other people in the story (figural narrative situation).

*Jude the Obscure*, then, analysed in the final chapter of this work, represents the climax of Hardy's innovative narrative. One aspect of this extreme innovation is evident in a change in Hardy's approach to the natural world and farm workers' lives. Agricultural activities and rhythms are substituted by metropolitan life, which receive an unequally strong emphasis here, already to some extent anticipated in *The Mayor*. The city, as a centre of culture, becomes for Jude (and to a lesser extent for Phillotson and Sue for instance) an ideal of culture and progress, the centre of his imaginary pilgrimage.

A second element of change appears in the once well-balanced relation between *mimetic* and *diegetic* elements, which had been one fundamental aspect of the previous novels. This is here, in fact, destroyed in favour of a remarkable appearance of elements of the first type, that is, a less obtrusive presence of the story's narrator, who alternates with the other characters, left free to express themselves through their own voices. Mediation by the narrator, therefore, loses its strength and the people in the story are left to talk for themselves, with a growing use of dialogues and indirect speech and thought.

A third aspect of innovation, also analysed in the last chapter, is Hardy's most developed use of *symbols* and images, which causes a deep transformation of the author's narrative conventions. The crucial symbols of geographical and figural places, suggested by the word 'spot', and that

of an endless circularity, represented by the recurrence of the word 'circle', give a spontaneous impulse to a re-reading and re-interpretation of all of Hardy's world.

*Movement* and *change* become, in fact, in this last expression of Hardy's narrative, the key words for a wider interpretation of the rest of our author's works of fiction. These words dominate the British industrial world, its relations and definition; movement may, in fact, represent progress and regress for Victorian thinkers in the enormous battle of argumentation, while change appears to be the informing aspect of the period.

## A PAIR OF BLUE EYES : A DOUBLE VISION

The novel *A Pair of Blue Eyes* is an extremely good example of how the choice of narrative themes and images corresponds to that of fictional voices and authorial interventions. In this chapter I will try to show how the image of duality<sup>1</sup> can be used to explore both the narrative plot, with its recurrent parallel episodes, predictions and coincidences, and the relationships between the different fictional voices in the novel.

In this novel, Hardy has *deliberately* used a multiplicity of narrative patterns, 'no one of which can be made to dominate the others',<sup>2</sup> and for this reason he has been accused of formal *incoherence*. Yet this text's incoherence represents only one of his repertoire of strategies. All these different patterns, in fact, represent a way to *unsettle* the reader with an immediate reference to a multiple vision and interpretation of reality. If the world Hardy tries to represent is one seen from different points of view, this contrasting and incoherent mode of narration is then a necessary choice by our author.<sup>3</sup>

The story is undoubtedly based on the two different, we could almost say, opposite relationships formed by Elfride Swancourt, the main female character in the novel, first

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<sup>1</sup>There are many examples in the novel to suggest the recurrence of an image of duality: for instance, 'the two little girls', Thomas Hardy, *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, edited by Alan Manford, The World's Classics, (Oxford, 1985), p.41; 'a rival pair', *ibidem*, p.181; Elfride's ear-rings, *ibid.*, pp.187,297; 'two and two', *ibid.*, p.362; 'pair of weddings', *ibid.*, p.370; 'the pair...a pair of coffins', *ibid.*, p.371; 'side by side', *ibid.*, p.371.

<sup>2</sup>James R. Kincaid, 'Hardy's Absences', in *Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Thomas Hardy*, edited by Dale Kramer, (London, 1979), p.202, note 1 on formal incoherence. Most critics, like Kincaid, have interpreted this novel as an 'incoherent text': 'Few readers have found *A Pair of Blue Eyes* to be a very coherent text'. He continues: 'It is a virtue of Hardy's art that these non-explaining explanations continue to haunt us, that he is able to use the power of absences to effect a brilliantly incoherent art' (p.209).

<sup>3</sup>The same view is shared by Rosemarie Morgan who thinks it 'possible to regard them [contradictions and shifting perspective] more in the light of a coherent, if complicated, literary stratagem', *op. cit.*, p.28.



with Stephen Smith, and later Henry Knight. Two distinct lovers and a difficult, yet fundamental choice for our heroine, who chooses the wrong man, is despised by him, and, at the end, dies: this is apparently the core of Hardy's book. Yet I have not casually chosen the word 'apparently', for, if the story and plot can be recognised as within the tradition of many nineteenth-century novels, the sense of a duality which permeates the different levels of the narrative text brings this novel, though one of the earliest experiments by Hardy, well beyond a mere example of desperate love in fiction.

The first of Elfride's love relationships is contained in the first seventeen chapters of the book, where her lover, Stephen Smith, associated by many biographers with the young Hardy himself, is presented by the novel's narrator as a double image of the woman. Here is a first description of Stephen at his arrival at Castle Boterel:

His complexion was as fine as Elfride's own; the pink of his cheeks almost as delicate. His mouth as perfect as Cupido's bow in form, and as cherry-red in colour as hers. Bright curly hair; bright sparkling blue-grey eyes... .<sup>4</sup>

These words remind us of Elfride's presentation through her intensely blue eyes,<sup>5</sup> in the very first page of the book:

One point in her, however, you did notice: that was her eyes. In them was seen a sublimation of all of her; it was not necessary to look further: there she lived(p.7)

These eyes were blue; blue as autumn distance -- blue as the blue we see between the retreating mouldings of

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<sup>4</sup>Thomas Hardy, *op. cit.*, p.15. References to the following quotations are given in brackets.

<sup>5</sup>We find many references to both images of eyes and blue in the novel: for example: 'blue blood', *ibidem*, p.20; 'blue sea', *ibid.*, p.29; 'Eyes in eyes', *ibid.*, p.59; reference to Knight's eyes, *ibid.*, pp.127 and 210; (inner eye), *ibid.*, p.211; reference to Elfride's eyes, *ibid.*, pp.157 and 260; 'hazel eyes', *ibid.*, p.174; 'blue pallor', *ibid.*, p.258; 'shut forever', *ibid.*, p.371; landscape & atmosphere, *ibid.*, pp.106, 112 and 114.

hills and woody slopes on a sunny September morning. A misty and shady blue, that had no beginning or surface, and was looked into rather than at(p.7).

Here Elfride appears to possess one of those human faces to be found in expressionist pictures, whose eyes become the focus of any observer's attention. The story's narrator invites us to participate within the scene describing the woman, by using personal pronouns like 'you' and 'we', and we are immediately projected into Elfride's eyes, whose blue colour reminds us of endless distances in both time and space.

Stephen's eyes are 'blue grey', of a similar colour to those of the woman he loves, but the two lovers are not only similar but also complementary, as the following quotation shows:

He leapt from his seat like the impulsive lad that he was, slid round to her side, and almost before she suspected it his arm was round her waist, and the two sets of curls intermingled(p.54).

This is an extremely useful example of the visual effect of words to suggest the perfect combination of a man and a woman: we can almost visualise the blending of their similar hair. Yet their association is not limited to their physical aspect; here are some other quotations:

Upon the whole, a very interesting picture of Sweet-and-Twenty... (p.19)

...he [Stephen]...looked into the pupils of her eyes with the confidence that only honesty can give, and even that to youth alone(p.49).

The narrator's point of view is that of an observer of a 'sweet picture' of 'honesty' and 'youth': eyes are here used again to represent the vulnerable nature of the girl, which can be discovered only by a complementary being such as her partner. It is interesting that words used by the narrator

to refer to the story's characters are similar to those used by the author himself with reference to the nature of his novel, as in the preface of 1912:

To the ripe-minded critic of the present one an immaturity in its views of life and in its workmanship will of course be apparent. But to correct these by the judgement of later years, even had correction been possible, would have resulted, as with all such attempts, in the disappearance of whatever freshness and spontaneity the pages may have as they stand(p.4).

Words like 'immaturity', 'freshness', and 'spontaneity' refer as much to the novel as a book, as to the striking nature of the story and its characters. No more perfect combination could be found than that of a relatively young author telling the lives of his younger characters, and choosing, for his plot, the deceptively simple pattern of an early love, first found and, then, lost.

Two other quotations show the narrator's association of Stephen with the woman he loves:

...his brain had extraordinary receptive powers, and no great creativeness. Quickly acquiring any kind of knowledge he saw around him, and having a plastic adaptability more common in woman than in man, he changed colour like a chameleon as the society he found himself in assumed a higher and more artificial tone(p.92)

The emotional side of his constitution was built rather a feminine than a male model; and that tremendous wound from Knight's hand may have tended to keep alive a warmth which solicitousness would have extinguished altogether(p.345).

These are taken from different points in the novel, the first from one of the first chapters, the second from one of



the last chapters of the book. Despite this, they both represent a similar description of Stephen's personality, whose most striking quality is that of being closer to a female than a male nature.<sup>6</sup> He is not a creative spirit, but an adaptable being, and represents, therefore, one of the narrator's images of women, probably derived from social interpretations of the female role in Victorian society.

There are many points in the novel where the narrator or some other character feels free to declare his / her own views about women in general. Here are some interventions in the narrative to suggest the Victorian standard interpretation of the female character:

'I see the difference between me and you -- between men and women generally, perhaps. I am content to build happiness on any accidental basis that may lie near at hand; you are for making a world to suit your happiness' (p.61)

Women accept their destiny more readily than men (p.78)

'It is extraordinary how many women have no honest love of music as an end and not as a means, even leaving out those who have nothing in them. They mostly like it for its accessories. I have never met a woman who loves music as do ten or a dozen men I know' (p.178).

In the first quotation it is Elfride and not a male character to speak; she presumes (and therefore the use of 'perhaps') to 'see' a difference between men and women in the way these approach life and build their happiness. Women would live with no purpose nor plan for their lives, they would rely on the easiest or closest things, while the men

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<sup>6</sup>Rosemarie Morgan compares Stephen's passive withdrawal from Elfride to Giles Winterborne's passive retreat from Grace's love in *The Woodlanders*, to Henchard's treatment and dismissal of Farfrae in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, or to Wildeve's (*The Return of the Native*), Fitzpiers's (*The Woodlanders*), and Angel Clare's (*Tess of the d'Urbervilles*) dismissal of their women. For her these male characters are as 'capricious' as female characters. 'The sickroom in Hardy is not reserved, as it was in Victorian society, for woman', Rosemarie Morgan, *op. cit.*, p.60.

would actively put into action their intentions by transforming the world to their needs.

The same image of passivity is suggested by the second quotation, this time through the narrator's words. Women are ready to 'accept' their fate, their lovers, their life with resignation because they are weak and in need of help, possibly a male support. It was, of course, a nineteenth-century standard view of the female being as not only a different but also an inferior being, doomed to child-bearing and house-keeping.

It is very interesting to find a male (the narrator, yet is he indeed a male narrator?) and a female character (Elfride) sharing the same opinion about women; they both reflect the conventional views on femininity as a distinct, almost opposite, universe.

The third quotation refers to Mr Knight's words. We can see here again, as in the first of our quotations, a clear reference to women's lack of a purposeful life; it is not in their nature to take into consideration an 'end' nor a 'means' for their actions. They simply live with no interest but for accessory things, superfluous aspects of their daily life.

The following are some more lines on the same subject; women:

'Every woman now-a-days', resumed Mrs. Smith, 'if she marry at all, must expect a father-in-law of a rank lower than her father. The men have gone up so, and the women have stood still'(p.90)

Perhaps a man who has got thoroughly into a woman's mind in this manner, is half way to her heart; the distance between those two stations is proverbially short(p.176).

The above quotations are additional examples of similar views. The first is a female voice, that of Mrs Smith; yet she represents the standard Victorian opinion about women

and their place in society. While men can experiment with cultural and professional growth, their mothers, sisters and wives cannot; these 'must', and the choice of this verb seems to be perfect, be 'content' to 'stay still', immobile in their passive role of watchers (see Elizabeth-Jane in *The Mayor*, for example), or sexual victims (Tess).

The second example lets us hear the novel's narrator's voice; he refers to common ideas about women, opinions 'proverbially' known among Hardy's contemporaries. Women are here defined as a closed category, as a species apart from human male representatives, different even in their physiological characteristics. The Victorian division between 'mind' and 'heart' is here at work; yet in women these two distinct spheres seem to be confused because of an irrational use of their mind and a rational examination of their feelings.

'That a young woman has taken to writing is not by any means the best thing to hear about her.'

'What is the best?'

'...I suppose to hear that she has married.'

'And what when she has been married?'

'Then to hear no more about her' (p.155).

This is one of the most incisive dialogues in the story; it refers to a conversation between Elfride and Knight, where the man freely expresses his misogynist opinions on the female world. We do not need many words to say how Knight's choice of verbs and nouns reflects and synthesizes, at the same time, the late-nineteenth-century female standard.

Back to Stephen, we can say that he adapts himself to socially higher environments,<sup>7</sup> much as the woman usually adapts herself to her naturally higher partners: he can transform himself as the woman is compelled to do so in order to be more easily accepted into a male-structured universe. At the same time, he also shares distinctively

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<sup>7</sup>For David Trotter (*The English Novel in History 1895-1920*, (London, 1993), p.38) it is Arabella Donn in *Jude the Obscure* who best displays such 'protean adaptability'.

female emotional qualities, that is, as in the case of our quotation, an unconscious and masochistic attraction towards pains and sufferings, an absolute desire to be despised.

In a period when *degeneration* represented a recurrent preoccupation of Victorians, standard male qualities and behaviours were sanctified by a deep separation line from all those which could belong to the woman's sphere. Any manifestation of exception from that standard came to be seen as a symptom of decadence, of disease. Nineteenth-century people, therefore, were easily disgusted by any kind of display of female qualities (as these had been *scientifically* categorized) in a man. Episodes such as Wilde's life and trial, for instance, caused a reaction in those who firmly believed in a well-defined male standard.<sup>8</sup>

It is in this context that Hardy uses Stephen's character to suggest a different and subversive presentation of man. He possesses qualities which are said by the narrator to be more feminine than masculine (and here he refers to a Victorian female standard); he does not represent the typical male lover, who is able gently to dominate the woman and her thoughts (as Mr Knight will do), yet, on the contrary, he is dominated by Elfride, whose *female* brain is big enough to win their chess games.

Stephen Smith appears, therefore, to be an object of the author's strategy in *A Pair*: his representation unsettles the Victorian world of fixed standards and categories, as Michael Henchard in *The Mayor*, and Tess in the novel which takes her name. Stephen fails to represent the male Victorian standard, just as Henchard subverts nineteenth-century belief in a rigid distinction between right and wrong,<sup>9</sup> and Tess embodies a female character who escapes any categorization.

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<sup>8</sup>For an analysis of the masculine mode in literature, see Peter Schwengen, 'The Masculine Mode', in *Speaking of Gender*, edited by Elaine Showalter, (Routledge: New York, 1989), pp.101-112.

<sup>9</sup>For Elaine Showalter, Michael Henchard subverts the Victorian male standard rather than a moral one: '...Henchard's efforts...involve him in a pilgrimage of "unmanning" which is a movement towards both self-discovery and tragic vulnerability' (p.102). See Elaine Showalter, 'The Unmanning of the Mayor of Casterbridge', in *Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Thomas Hardy*, edited by Dale Kramer, (Macmillan: London, 1979), pp.99-115.

In one of the previous quotations, the one referring to the scene of the two lovers' first kiss, we have read words referring to Stephen's 'impulsiveness', which exactly describe a very similar kind of reaction Elfride shows in different occasions in the story.<sup>10</sup> Yet these words by the narrator do not seem to be completely reliable, since in a different and later point in the novel we find:

This act of patience was in keeping only with the nature of a man precisely of Stephen's constitution. Nine men out of ten would perhaps have rushed off, got into her presence, by fair means or foul, and provoked a catastrophe of some sort. Possibly for the better, probably for the worse(p.233).

This quotation refers to Stephen's 'patient' reaction after his disappointment for not having met Elfride on the night of his return to England. The 'act of patience' is represented as the consequential behaviour of such a nature, though at the beginning of the narrative the young man had been presented as an impulsive character. There are different possible answers for this contradiction in the description of Stephen's personality; one may be the suggestion of the narrator's incomplete knowledge about his nature, the other that we have a representation of two different stages in the man's life. The young man may have been changed by life experiences far from home, in distant India, experiences which are completely ignored in the narrative scheme, or he may possess a kind of personality which cannot be easily understood nor expressed by the novel's narrator. Yet what is strange about this quotation is that Hardy, though on one hand he may appear uncertain about his character's nature, on the other hand announces that Stephen's 'act of patience' is likely to be 'for the worse'. He thus unsettles the reader by being omniscient and ignorant of the novel's narrative scheme at the same time.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>See the episode of Elfride's elopement with Stephen (chapter XII), or Elfride's visit to Knight after their separation (chapter XXXV), Thomas Hardy, *op. cit.*.

<sup>11</sup>The narrator's incoherence can also be explained with the author's double position as both a secretly subversive novelist and one interested in the positive response of his conventional Victorian readers. For Rosemarie Morgan some of the narrator's



If, therefore, the narrator seems to be unreliable in his description of Stephen Smith's personality, if he appears to be producing a double interpretations of one of his male characters, the same happens with Elfride, whose character produces a similarly double, and, therefore, unclear and inconsistent interpretation. Let us read how the woman is first introduced upon the novel's scene by the narrator:

Elfride Swancourt was a girl whose emotions lay very near the surface(p.7).

With the narrator's choice of a past tense the reader is immediately distanced from the narrative world, he or she believes Elfride to be a character displaying a very simple personality, almost transparent, whose 'emotions' can be easily understood and labelled within the reading process. The following page offers the first opportunity to hear the woman's real voice, though she is introduced again by the narrator: 'Papa,' she said...(p.8).

In her very first entry on the novel's scene, Elfride Swancourt calls for her father, giving the reader the idea of a weak and young girl, who still depends upon the help and presence of an adult figure. This impression will be confirmed in later points in the novel, as, when capriciously disappointed by Stephen's behaviour, she says:

'Papa, here is your Elfride!' she exclaimed...(p.46).

Here she asks for her father's support when dissatisfied and discouraged by her first contacts with the external world. The same image of a weak being, incapable of decisions about her life is offered by some other quotations where the narrator plays the speaking voice:

...she dropped the rein upon Pansy's shoulders, and vowed she would be led whither the horse should take her(p.109)

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asides are used by Hardy to placate Grundyists: she detects in the novel '...the iconoclastic spirit that must await fame and public recognition before coming out into the open', *op. cit.*, p.29.

Pansy at home, during summer, had little but grass to live on. After a run to St. Launce's she always had a feed of corn to support her on the return journey. Therefore, being now more than half way, she preferred St. Launce's(p.110)

But Elfride did not remember this now. All she cared to recognize was a dreamy fancy that to-day's rash action was not her own. ...she was forced on by a sense of the necessity of keeping faith with herself, as promised in the inane vow of ten minutes ago(p.110).

Our heroine does not want to decide for one or another direction in her life and leaves her horse to make the choice for her. Pansy's instinctive decision to go on riding towards St Launce's and receive there a feed of corn for her journey back home is less vague than Elfride's behaviour. This female horse can take decisions better and faster than the woman, because the first has no unconscious desire to meet a lover. Elfride, therefore, feels attraction to Stephen and wants to get secretly married to him, but at the same time she wants to deny the real strength of her passion for the man. It is also interesting to note how the speaker reveals Elfride's hidden process of mind to the reader by the use of words as 'now' and 'ago', which let us get closer to the narrative world and enter it.

The same image of Elfride as the weak person who needs help and directions by others is given us by the woman herself:

'I want you to fix an hour, because I am weak, and may otherwise try to get out of it. ...Bind me strictly to my word' (p.262).

This quotation is taken from one of the last chapters of the novel, where Elfride reluctantly decides to reveal all her past to Henry Knight before Mrs Jethway. She feels morally obliged, therefore, to take a decision by external forces, but does not tell him her story at once. She prefers, with a masochistic impulse, to prolong the agony of a difficult

choice by asking her future husband to remind her of her promise. She feels the necessity of a 'binding' situation to be able to act at last.

Elfride is, then, not only reluctant to take decisive actions, but also unpractical, where this adjective displays a negative meaning. The following quotations show extremely similar points of view about the girl:

'You confuse future probabilities with present facts -- what the young man may be with what he is. We must look at what he is, not what an improbable degree of success in his profession may make him' (p.84)

'A perfect little lady. But people can't help their thoughts, and if she'd learnt to make figures instead of letters when she was at school 'twould have been better for her pocket...' (p.91).

In the first of the above quotations it is Elfride's father who speaks, in the second we hear Stephen's mother's voice. They both belong to an older generation, to an adult world where being practical is essential to cope with life, and unpractical beings have a dreadful time to adapt themselves. Elfride should<sup>12</sup> not dream about a 'probable' future, but stick to the 'present' and actual 'facts'; she should not devote herself to the dreamy worlds of romances, one of which she has in fact written, but learn how to live in real daily circumstances.

Besides being judged as weak and unrealistic, Elfride is also negatively regarded as being 'inconstant', as are many other heroines by Thomas Hardy. Here are some examples:

'You don't seem the same woman, Elfie, that you were yesterday'

'Nor am I' (p.117)

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<sup>12</sup>There is a recurrent use of modal verbs ('must' / 'should') to imply external obligation. See Thomas Hardy, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.



Perhaps there was a proneness to inconstancy in her nature -- a nature, to those who contemplate it from a standpoint beyond the influence of that inconstancy, the most exquisite of all in its plasticity and ready sympathies(p.248)

'...but girls have a chartered right to change their minds, you know' (p.252).

The three passages are taken from the narrative in chronological order, and they all demonstrate how the woman cannot be focused with absolute certainty. The first is a dialogue between Elfride and Stephen when she suddenly decides to go back without getting married, the second is one of the many explanations by the story's narrator, the third is Mr Swancourt's intervention about his daughter. In each of them, the woman appears as a fugitive being, her real personality cannot be grasped once and forever because she changes continually. If Stephen shows a kind of disappointment because of his inability to label the woman he loves,<sup>13</sup> the narrator refers to her distinctly female quality of 'plasticity', the same he had discovered in Stephen's character and called 'adaptability', in his case. It is very interesting to note the narrator's reference to some possible 'observers' from a distance, who could appreciate her nature of 'ready sympathies', and redefine inconstancy as responsiveness. Yet where both constancy and inconstancy are good qualities, the opposite of 'ready sympathies' is not.<sup>14</sup> Once again Hardy seems to be unsettling normal interpretations of reality. The firm Victorian division of the world into categories of positive and negative actions and temperaments is here subverted: one pair of opposites is equally good where another is not. If

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<sup>13</sup>Clym in *The Return of the Native* and Jude in *Jude the Obscure* share the same feeling about their inability to understand Eustacia and Sue respectively.

<sup>14</sup>It is interesting to note that some pages later Mr Knight will say to Stephen: "What fickle beings we men are, Stephen! Man may love strongest for a while, but women love longest...", where constancy becomes a thoroughly female quality. *Ibidem*, p.352.

the rule of opposite qualities, referring to precise categories of good and bad, therefore, works only sometimes, it becomes a non-rule, and Hardy wants to demonstrate this.

The third quotation is, then, a justification offered by Elfride's father, who is ready to protect, once again spoil his daughter, and distance her from any kind of real contact with life in the form of external judgements.

Another voice speaks and complains about her 'inconstancy', and this is Mr Knight's voice, without mediation by the narrator:

'I looked into your eyes, and thought I saw there truth and innocence as pure and perfect as ever embodied by God in the flesh of woman' (p.325).

These words are taken from almost the end of the narrative, when Henry Knight is extremely disappointed about his unrealistic impressions<sup>15</sup> about the woman he has loved till a few months before. The use of the verb 'to see' is clear enough to describe the man's false intuition about Elfride; he had built up and, consequently, loved an ideal figure of woman; a 'pure and perfect' being. He had moulded his statue with no past life nor feelings, but completely anew, whose breath of life had been given by no one but himself. 'Inconstancy', therefore, does not, here, apply to Elfride as a real woman, but to Knight's image of her.

Until now I have been dealing with one of the two images the novel's reader gets from a character like Elfride, that is of her being a fragile, dreamy, and unpractical woman. Yet she presents a different and apparently opposed personality throughout the story's development. Here is one of her interventions in the narrative, which can exemplify the possibility of an opposite reading of her character:

"I will in a minute. I am safe enough. I have done it often" (p.160).

The above words, which refer to the episode of Elfride's walk and fall from the 'elevated' 'parapet' of the tower, do

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<sup>15</sup>There are many references to *impressions*. See *ibid.*, pp.22 and 323-333.

not seem to be those of a woman unable to take decisions, or display the exact strength of her desires.

We have, therefore, two different or double impressions and interpretations of Elfride; the spoilt, fragile, weak, childish, and dreamy girl, who has never gone beyond her house's walls, and, almost the opposite, the one who decides to despise one lover for another, who travels and rides her horse alone, and can retain her freedom not to reveal her secrets to her father. A last quotation finally to exemplify this point, this time from the narrator's point of view:

'...Elfride was nowhere in particular, yet everywhere...' (p. 28)

This refers to one of the walks she has taken part in with her family, and it is a striking sensation of an almost spiritual being, with no corporeal substance to impose herself upon the events. Yet this woman, who seems to be 'nowhere' because of her instability, appears to be 'everywhere': as her life's events seem to be generated by an external force, through an uneasy system of coincidences and casualties,<sup>16</sup> they are, in fact, the development of Elfride's choices, sometimes only unconsciously taken. A double image of the woman is here confirmed; we are presented with her being both 'under' and 'above' the events of her life.

A double vision, as I have tried to show, is the idea which permeates the whole narrative construction; Stephen is a kind of double of Elfride, yet the woman herself is

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<sup>16</sup>There are many episodes of predictions and coincidences in the novel. For predictions see *ibid.*, pp.63, 64 (Knight); *ibid.*, pp.68, 205 (fall over the cliff); *ibid.*, chapter XVIII / chapter XXXIII (the episode of Elfride's fall on the tower as a prediction of Mrs Jethway's death = Elfride's ruin); *ibid.*, p.50 (Game of chess with both lovers); *ibid.*, chapter XXVI (space for Lord Luxellian's wife's coffin); *ibid.*, pp.41, 369 (Elfride as 'little mother'); introductory line to chapter III, *ibid.*, pp.18, 304 and 332 (narrator's prediction of future love); *ibid.*, p.361 (Stephen's dream). For coincidences see *ibid.*, p.151 (narrator's reference to coincidences); *ibid.*, p.77 (Mrs Jethway's son buried on Stephen's arrival day); *ibid.*, p.115 (Mrs Jethway witnesses elopement); *ibid.*, p.118 (Mr Swancourt not at home after elopement); *ibid.*, chapter XVII (Knight as reviewer of Elfride's novel); *ibid.*, p.217 (Stephen's cheque); *ibid.*, p.272 (discovery of the lost ear-ring); *ibid.*, pp.279, 282 and 288 (Mrs Jethway on the ship to Plymouth, maybe only Elfride's bad conscience); *ibid.*, p.290 (the episode of the myrtle); *ibid.*, p.318 (Mrs Jethway's letter); *ibid.*, pp.347, 348 (Knight discovers Elfride's profile); *ibid.*, p.363 (Knight & Stephen on the same train as Elfride's coffin).

watched through a duplicity of points of views: the narrator's, her two lovers', her father's, her own, and those of the other people in the story. Each of them receives a different impression from Elfride, and any of them produces a truthful image of reality, for this is composed of an infinite number of parts. Hardy thus manages to instil in his reader a doubt about the univocal vision dear to Victorians; he succeeds in using his strategical narrative points of view to invoke an enlarged and wiser judgment upon reality.

Elfride and Stephen's relationship seems, then, to represent a mirror-image of the second love story of the novel, that is a double, yet opposite representation of a balanced intercourse between a man and woman.<sup>17</sup> Let us read a quotation which fully expresses the quality of Elfride and Stephen's love experience:

What a proud moment it was for Elfride then! She was ruling a heart with absolute despotism for the first time in her life(p.58).

We hear the narrator's voice again, and by his choice of a temporal adverb as 'then', at the same time as that of a progressive form for the verb ('was ruling'), we are, first, distanced, then, immediately after, asked to get closer to the narrative to experience Elfride's sense of power in ruling Stephen's heart. We do not fail to recognise the nature of such a relationship between the two young lovers, in which the woman is absolutely in charge of whatever decision to be taken about their future together.

An exactly opposite relation is offered by Elfride's total dependence on Knight's will, who can rule her as Stephen could not. The following is a quotation from the point in the novel where the despised lover (Stephen) becomes an observer of Elfride's second relationship:

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<sup>17</sup>For Rosemarie Morgan, *op. cit.*, Elfride represents the first of Hardy's 'misrepresentations' of womanhood, since she is sexually instigative and also sets the pace with a transgression of convention and subversion of ethical codes of culture.

She had ruled him like a queen in that matter, as in all others. Stephen could tell by her manner, brief as had been his observation of it, and by her words, few as they were, that her position was far different with Knight. That she looked up and adored her new lover from below his pedestal, was even more perceptible than that she had smiled down upon Stephen from a height above him(pp.238-9).

Though it is again the narrator who talks here, we can perceptibly hear Stephen's thoughts. The words used are extremely effective in suggesting that the second of Elfride's love relationships is not only different, but a double of the first with Stephen, overturned, like an image in a mirror. And the prepositions 'up' and 'above', in contrast with 'down' and 'below' are the best choice to produce such an effect.

If the novels can be divided into two main parts exploring the two opposite love stories, this is only partly true, since there is a third, if not evident, still very important relation between Knight and Stephen, which takes the whole of the last five chapters of the book. At the end of the story Elfride seems to have disappeared from the novel's scene, leaving her central place to the two men she had been in love with: Knight and Stephen, whose friendship, if we can call it such,<sup>18</sup> had been previous to their falling in love with the woman.

Knight as a lover was far simpler than his friend Stephen, who in other capacities was shallow beside him(p.271)

Stephen pushed aside the curtain, and before him sat a man writing away as if his life depended upon it -- which it did. ...Knight did not rise(p.127)

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<sup>18</sup>See Thomas Hardy, *op. cit.*, pp.130-1.



He [Knight]...soon was ushered into the young man's presence, whom he found sitting in front of a comfortable fire, beside a table spread with a few scientific periodicals and art reviews(p.346).

The above quotations effectively describe the relation between the two men. In the first of them we discover that, despite the fact that Knight is successful with Elfride, whereas Stephen fails to be loved desperately, the two male characters are complementary, just as the woman was similar and complementary to the youngest of them. Moreover, there seems to be a contradiction in the narrator's words, since the one who appears to be victorious in love is described as 'simpler', while his antagonist is 'shallow', though he succeeds in making a career in life.

As for the next two quotations, they represent one of the many examples of parallel episodes,<sup>19</sup> which are not the repetition of one scene twice, but the presentation of a second episode which is identical to a previous one, yet distorted as in a mirror image. In both the scenes we have the entering of one of the two men into the study room of the other; and in both passages the one who is sitting does not rise before the other. This is of exceptional importance in the novel, since Knight and Stephen are not two normal friends, but the former plays the part of a sort of tutor for the latter, who becomes, at the end of the novel, the person Knight has to follow to discover the truth. If Knight, therefore, represents a kind of intellectual guide for Stephen, the latter becomes the one to whom to appeal for the explanation of the mysteries about Elfride's past life. Here is a passage taken from the last lines of the novel:

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<sup>19</sup>For examples of parallel episodes, see *ibidem*, pp.30-1 (Mr Swancourt's & Elfride's confessions about the sermons); *ibid.*, pp.34, 66 (Stephen forgets to wave to Elfride as Stephen forgets to search for Elfride's ear-ring); *ibid.*, pp.72, 308 (sitting on the grave); *ibid.*, pp.103, 121 (Mr Swancourt's & Elfride's secret marriages); *ibid.*, p.162 (Elfride's déjà vu / prediction); *ibid.*, pp.260, 328 (the blotting out of images from eyes); *ibid.*, pp.299-300 (walks up the cliff); *ibid.*, pp. 53, 164 and 168 (the two games of chess); *ibid.*, pp.110, 288 (the arrivals at Plymouth); *ibid.*, pp.242, 366 (Lord Luxellian's two wives' death).



They felt themselves to be intruders. ...And side by side they retraced their steps down the grey still valley to Castle Boterel(p.371).

With these closing words the narrator nullifies the two men's antagonistic differences, since they are assimilated in being forgotten by the woman they both discover to love. It is with a kind of surprised smile that the reader discover Elfride's recent past; we are led to believe, as the other two male characters are, in Elfride's death for love, yet suddenly another unforeseen event, that of her marriage with Lord Luxellian, whom she had always found attractive, appears to change the nature of the narrative pattern and our expectations. We feel it impossible once again to label, and even only to understand Elfride's inner motives and decisions. We are left with a sense of our inability to grasp and preserve a single, definitive vision of the woman.

As the two men proceed through the valley, and feel themselves as 'intruders' in Elfride's life, we close our book with a similar sensation of being foreign in a strange country, that is, that of a novel which has surprised and overturned all our anticipations within a traditional narrative pattern.

The narrative technique employed in *The Return of the Native* is unusual, in a manner which brings the novel closer to modernist works. This is, perhaps, the main problem an attentive reader has to cope with, since this novel contains elements belonging to both a late Victorian and early twenty-century sensibility.

It is a long novel because written in several books, a division that is traditionally Victorian, to satisfy the need for serialization, since each of these books was published separately for a wider diffusion among middle-class families of that age.<sup>1</sup> Yet, its still well-developed plot does not seem to fulfil Victorian expectations for any *Bildungsroman* (novel of development) where the hero or heroine experiences innumerable troubles to find, in the end, a complete solution to their problems. Nor does it imitate a kind of *domestic* fiction, which provided an indubitably happy ending to the story. The plot of *The Return of the Native* seems very dense, full of events and characters, in the clear tradition of an early kind of fiction, but it is so only apparently, since at a closer look, it can be easily distinguished as the product of a later stage of Victorian literary sensibility.

Hardy's characters, for instance, cannot be reduced to the representation of a temperament, as it was for the French Naturalistic novel, nor can they be considered puppets in the hands of their creator -- the novelist -- since they are almost modern human beings, with a well-defined will, marked desires, aspirations, memories, recollections, and self-

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<sup>1</sup>Serialization took two different forms: one was that of 'numbers' sold separately, the other that of a part of a newspaper or magazine. For recent studies on this topic, see John Sutherland, *Victorian Novelists and Publishers*, (London, 1976); Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking*, (London, 1985); Nigel Cross, *The Common Writer. Life in Nineteenth-Century Grub Street*, (Cambridge, 1985); and Peter Keating, *The Haunted Study. A Social History of the English Novel 1875-1914*, (London, 1989).

consciousness of their seclusion from the rest of community. If, therefore, we can see, on one hand, the community of pre-industrial England, with its bonfires, maypoles, wedding dances, its men and women whose names are hardly to be remembered, and whose words are products of the same mind -- the folk's mind -- we can also, on the other hand, distinguish among them individual characters, who though belonging to that community, are able to separate themselves from their original background, and live as individual, yet divided selves.<sup>2</sup>

It is useful, at this point, to remember how Eustacia Vye is first presented in the novel. She appears as 'a woman's' figure<sup>3</sup> to be seen on top of the heath, to which she represents a lantern to a dome. She is called 'queen of the solitude' (p.12), while the working people of her community, the furze-cutters 'marched in trail, like a travelling flock of sheep' (p.13).

This woman, therefore, is easily underlined as one of the main characters -- if not the only one, in the novel, through the author's representation of her wish to free herself from that place, Egdon Heath, which she fully belongs to, through his representation of her detachment from the local people, who regard her as 'very strange in her ways, living up there by herself' (p.27), and, at last, through the representation of her tragic death, about which the author leaves a mystery.

At the very beginning, she is presented as 'a woman's' (p.12) figure, then as Vye's granddaughter, and we get to know her full name only after many pages in the novel,<sup>4</sup> though by then we have already penetrated her feelings, apprehensions and powerful will. Why, therefore,

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<sup>2</sup>For Elaine Scarry, Hardy's characters are good examples of an identity which is formed not by the development of consciousness but by a 'reciprocal alteration' of man and world. See 'Work and the Body in Hardy and Other Nineteenth-Century Novelists', *Representations*, 3, pp.90-123.

<sup>3</sup>Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, edited by Simon Gatrell, *The World's Classics*, (London, 1990), p.12. References to the following quotations are given in brackets.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibidem*, p.63.

is Hardy presenting a well-defined character, like Eustacia Vye, without the need for a name? Hardy is not Dickens, who labels his creatures, by imposing upon them a very distinctive name, which can also remind his readers of a very distinctive temperament and moral behaviour. Hardy is more interested in individuals -- in this particular case, a woman.

The other lonely and outcast character in the novel is Clym Yeobright, who, like Eustacia, is separated from the community. Yet he does not have the will and stubbornness to impose himself upon events, as Eustacia has, but tries to adapt himself to the tragic circumstances of life. If, therefore, Eustacia becomes the heroine of the novel, preparing the way to Tess, and satisfying late-Victorian interests in women, as well as in tragedies, Clym becomes the fictional representation of the capacity of man to adapt to different and unexpected circumstance.<sup>5</sup> Let us see how this character is presented by the narrator.

Though the title of the novel refers to him, Clym Yeobright is mentioned for the first time only in *Book Second*, called 'The Arrival', and with his arrival from Paris: 'like a man coming from heaven' (p.108) and not as a native. Many things change in little Edgong -- Eustacia's ideal lover, Thomasin and Mrs. Yeobright's lives, among many others. The community, together with Eustacia, regards him as an exceptional man, but the narrator reduces this man's exceptional qualities by pointing out that:

The effect upon Eustacia was palpable. The extraordinary pitch of excitement that she had reached beforehand would, indeed, have caused her to be influenced by the most commonplace man (p.139).

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<sup>5</sup>For David De Laura, in 'The Ache of Modernism' in Hardy's Later Novels', *Journal of English Literary History*, 34, (1967), there is in this novel a contrast between the Victorian world, represented by Clym together with the other characters, and the Hellenic spirit, embodied by Eustacia and the heath. Clym would be so incompatible with the Titanic force of the woman, in a marked contrast between Greek and modern world, parity and disparity, and unity and disunity. For Rosemarie Morgan, *op. cit.*, Clym is seen by Hardy as 'an infestation, parasitical', insensitive to Eustacia's suffering, and an example of 'blind egocentrism'.

Clym is, therefore, the object of both the community's reverence for the outsider, and Eustacia's desire to love:

She had loved him partly because he was exceptional in this scene, partly because she had determined to love him, chiefly because she was in desperate need of loving somebody after wearying of Wildeve(p.142).

Here are not the narrator's words but Eustacia's, who is a fully modern being, conscious of the motives of her attractions and ambitions.

A third prominent character in *The Return of the Native* is the heath. It does not represent the traditional Victorian pastoral setting of Hardy's *Under the Greenwood Tree*, nor a background of provincial life, as for George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, but it becomes the expression of a powerful entity, which can also be called destiny or fate. The author reserves one long chapter to Edgong Heath at the opening of the novel -- it is a Saturday afternoon, in November, it is the time of nightfall, and it is gloomy -- all this to convey an atmosphere of quietness and peace, which comes not from fulfilment, but sadness and immobility. The heath appears as a real character: '[the heath] could...' (p.3); 'nobody could be said to understand the heath' (p.3), and again:

Every night its Titanic form seemed to await something; but it had waited thus, unmoved, during so many centuries, through the crises of so many things, that it could only be imagined to await one last crisis -- the final overthrow(p.4),

or 'The great inviolate place...' (p.6), against the continuing changes of seas, fields, rivers, villages, and people.

This place possesses an unknown energy and vitality, which it shares, not only with storms and winds:

...the storm was its lover, and the wind its friend....  
the home of strange phantoms(p.5),

but also with human nature, since the narrator says:



It was at present a place perfectly accordant with man's nature...It had a lonely face, suggesting tragical possibilities(p.5).

Yet, in analysing the words 'lonely' and 'tragical', which are chosen by the writer, we will clearly see that the heath is not only the representation of the rural community of Edgon, but it is also a metaphor for those who have been presented as the outcasts, the outsiders of the social group, the only ones to be able to act without the influence of values, shared and imposed upon them by society. If, therefore, the heath, which is a powerful and magic place, where all important events of the plot occur (Eustacia and Wildeve's secret meetings, Mrs. Yeobright's death, Diggory Venn's discoveries, Eustacia's end, the village's feasts, and Clym's concluding sermon), is a metaphor for the main novel's characters, this is also true for the narrator, who wants his position to coincide with those lonely beings in the story. The heath is magic, untouchable, symbolic, confusing, and a place where everything can become possible.

One more word has to be said in examining the novel's ending. There is no doubt about the fact that the story does not finish happily, as Victorian fiction and Victorian readers would have preferred. Eustacia dies, drowned in a weir, during her escape from Edgon, but we are left unsure about the nature of her death -- a suicide or an accident? The author gives no explanation. Thomasin is finally married to Diggory Venn, who has now developed into a respectable farmer, and they both represent, in a way, the characters whom the Victorian public was used to. The narrator suggests they are going to live happily, and this is likely to be true, since they are characters belonging to a past ideal world, the world of the rural English community before the arrival of railways and industries.

Thomasin, also called Tamsie by Clym, represents the kind of lovable character, requested and therefore prevalent in the fiction of the time. She is presented, at first, as a child, in her sleep: 'A fair, sweet, and honest country face... reposing...' (p.36), and then as a girl, a gentle but



weak girl, who has to oppose the woman who lives in Eustacia.<sup>6</sup>

Diggory Venn is a very interesting character<sup>7</sup> -- he is a reddleman throughout the novel, a scaring red face for most of the people in the village, almost a supernatural spirit, who can be everywhere to spy on people. Thomasin says in the novel: "It seemed supernatural" (p.388).<sup>8</sup>

This character has received a great deal of critical attention and has been interpreted in different, often contrasting ways; he has, in fact, been seen both as a benign force and as the embodiment of a diabolic intervention in the human world.

J.O. Bailey,<sup>9</sup> for instance, associates Diggory Venn with two other 'Mephistophelian Visitants' in Hardy's novels: Mrs Endorfield in *Under the Greenwood Tree*, and Sergeant Troy in *Far from the Madding Crowd*. They are seen as 'invaders' in the three narrative worlds, the ones who change the course of events in the story. Diggory, in particular, 'seems to be a symbolic character, an aspect of some such force as the Ishmaelitish heath seems to be, rather than one of the human beings who play out their drama according to its pulls upon them' (pp.1153-54).

The 'satanic symbolism' suggested by Bailey in the reddleman is contradicted by opposite critical positions of those who think this character is the embodiment of a

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<sup>6</sup>Hardy seems here to make a distinction between the two Victorian types of woman, the conventional virginal madonna and the 'New Woman'. For Rosemarie Morgan, *op. cit.*, Eustacia represents the model goddess contrasting with the model woman (Thomasin).

<sup>7</sup>See Phillip Mallett ('An Idiosyncratic Mode of Regard', in *A Spacious Vision*, edited by Phillip Mallett and Ronald P. Draper, (Penzance, 1994), pp.18-32), for whom Diggory Venn '...comes to personify the incongruity between human desire and purpose on the one hand, and on the other the realities of frustration and defeat...' (p.26).

<sup>8</sup>Mainstream criticism has interpreted this character as a benign regulating force, as a *deus ex machina*; for Rosemarie Morgan, *op. cit.*, the reddleman is an intruder and watchdog, a mirror of the Victorian conscience.

<sup>9</sup>See J.O. Bailey, 'Hardy's "Mephistophelian Visitants"', *PMLA*, 61, (1946), pp.1146-84.

'protective role'.<sup>10</sup> This is the case of Sandy Cohen,<sup>11</sup> or F.B. Pinion<sup>12</sup> who in a chapter called 'Mephistopheles, Satan, and Red Cigars' says:

The description of reddlemen as 'Mephistophelian Visitants' in *The Return of the Native* (I. ix) has no significance beyond colour, the Mephistopheles of tradition appearing in a red cloak. Diggory Venn plays a protective role, and there is obviously nothing sinister about him. As (in contrast to Christian Cantle) he is the only reliable agent Hardy has provided to solve some of his plot problems, he has an extraordinary habit of appearing in the nick of time, and this combines with the startling effect of his colour to create some slightly supernatural impressions... (pp.59-60).

Apart from critical debates, the reddleman Diggory Venn seems to be one of the many observers in the story of the novel; yet he does not only watch from a distance but he also intervenes in the plot and in a decisive way. He is, in fact, the one who causes Clym's misfortune by giving his share of the money from Mrs Yeobright to Thomasin, and so changing the course of events, leading on towards the consequent bad relationship between mother and son, the unexpected visit of Mrs Yeobright, her death, Eustacia's ruin and death.

I would not say he is a destructive character since his intentions are good, he attempts throughout the novel to do good to the other people in Egdon; he acts to solve the happenings for the best and only *unintentionally* is guilty of their destruction. Diggory Venn is, therefore, more a

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<sup>10</sup>For a synthesis of both views on the reddleman figure in *The Return*, see John Hagan, 'A Note on the Significance of Diggory Venn', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 16:2, (1961), pp.147-55.

<sup>11</sup>See Sandy Cohen, 'Blind Clym, Unchristian Christian and the Redness of the Reddleman: Character Correspondences in *The Return of the Native*', *Thomas Hardy's Yearbook*, no.11, (1984), pp.49-55.

<sup>12</sup>See F.B. Pinion, *Thomas Hardy: Art and Thought*, (London, 1977).

kind of character whose action is unconscious, as if in sleep or ignorance of a clear distinction between right and wrong, good and bad. He is an ingenuous being who cannot evaluate the effects of his deeds, who acts without exact knowledge of the consequences of his decisions on the fictional scene.

This novel gives us many hints to investigate about those changes in Victorian society, which had brought a novelist like Hardy to leave this story, as many others, unresolved. In *Far from the Madding Crowd*, a novel written only four years before, he had at least tried to make it end happily with another marriage, that of Gabriel with Bathsheba, which in spite of all doubts he had hinted throughout the novel. Yet, in *The Return of the Native* he no longer pretends to have faith in a providential intervention from above, and, even if only in a timid way, he succeeds in communicating late Victorian doubts about future human life.

The book finishes unresolved and the reader is asked to complete it.

It is my intention to continue this discussion by looking, now, more closely at this narrative example of *The Return of the Native*. I will, more precisely, concentrate on one of the main characters in the novel; Eustacia -- and demonstrate how this novel, through its main female character, suggests its author's belief in her *uniqueness*.<sup>13</sup>

I would say Eustacia is the main character in *The Return*, the one on which Hardy concentrated his main interests as an author. Clym seems, in fact, to be too clearly characterized to leave place to the readers' fantasy and reflection; he is an undoubtly central character in the novel, yet he misses that ambiguity in the presentation which is displayed by all major characters in Hardy's narrative.

Clym is, therefore, mostly the embodiment of a contrasting and opposite temperament and destiny from Eustacia's: he is

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<sup>13</sup>By Eustacia's *uniqueness* I mean a female personality which cannot be labelled by observers. The woman is thus 'singular' because different from others.

a clear representation of a mild and unimpulsive man, who can accept life with evangelical resignation,<sup>14</sup> whereas the woman cannot adapt to misfortune nor to a life which is different from her dreams.<sup>15</sup>

In the novel, Eustacia Vye is presented through the eyes and minds of many different observers, who very often do not agree about their points of view. Eustacia thus becomes the focus of different sensitivities, and cultures, both in space and time, and eventually a symbol of the clash between the new world and the old one, that is between Victorian and modern England.

Yet, the coincidence of so many opinions about Eustacia appears, eventually, to signify the impossibility of defining her in a coherent way. She is a beautiful woman, a girl, an obscure figure, a witch, a martyr, a 'hussy', and, at last, a 'cold form'. The Egdon community has its own idea of Eustacia Vye, her husband another, her secret lover still a different one, and so the narrator, and Eustacia herself. Everyone projects upon her what he wants her to represent in an opposite relation to himself, that is, every observer in the story needs to create his own Eustacia to discover and understand his own self in a comparative relation with her. The multiple views of Eustacia are, therefore, not representations of that woman, but imaginative constructions of her personality. She is all those things and nothing of them at the same time; she is a witch, yet she dies in water and not in fire, she is an 'epicure', yet she lives through her dreams and fantasies, she is an 'Héloïse', as well as a 'Cleopatra'.

Eustacia Vye cannot be blocked in a frame to describe her characteristic features, thoughts, feelings, dreams, and

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<sup>14</sup>A similar position is held by Robert C. Schweik in 'Themes, Character, and Perspective in Hardy's *The Return of the Native*', *Philological Quarterly*, 41, (1962), pp.757-67, where he sees Clym as the representation of a 'thoughtful asceticism of the future'.

<sup>15</sup>For critical works giving centrality to Clym Yeobright's character, see V.T.Hopkins, 'Clym the Obscure', *Thomas Hardy Society Review*, 1:9, (1983), pp.273-5; Ann M.B. Benway, 'Oedipus Abroad: Hardy's Clym Yeobright and Lawrence's Paul Morel', *Thomas Hardy Year Book*, 13, (1986), pp.51-7; M.E. Jordan, 'Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*: Clym Yeobright and Melancholia', *American Imago*, 39, (1982), pp.101-18.

passions, for she possesses no characteristic elements at all, but that of being unique in her incoherence, as any of us is in his own way. *Uniqueness* is therefore that magic word, which helps us to understand a modern world of incongruities, where everything is something and its precise opposite at the same time.

I will start by presenting the different voices of the novel, those characters and non-characters, whom the reader can hear speaking in the pages of the book, and try to suggest what Eustacia represents for each of them. In the different representations of the woman, therefore, we will not discover how Eustacia Vye is, but only what her observers need to see represented in other beings. It will help us more to understand them than the female character, object of their observation and approval -- or, more often, their disapproval and judgement.

#### a) THE NARRATOR

The narrator must be presented first, as he is the most intrusive voice in the narrative. Talking about the narrator's fictional perspective, the main question that arises is; who the narrator really is and what is his function in the novel's world. J. Hillis Miller, in *The Form of Victorian Fiction*,<sup>16</sup> says that the narrator is 'a standard convention of Victorian Fiction [in which] the novelist choose(s) to play...the role of a collective mind...'. .

The narrator's function is, therefore, in a way, separate from the authorial one, that is, the narrator and the author seem to be two different narrative voices in the novel, though, most of the time, it is not very easy to distinguish between these two speakers.

As for the narrator, Hillis Miller continues: '...[he] is able to remember perfectly all the past, to foresee the

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<sup>16</sup>J. Hillis Miller, *The Form of Victorian Fiction*, (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1968), pp.53-90.



future course of events, and to penetrate the heart of each man...[he] is like an immanent God who has perfect knowledge not of his creation, but of the creation of another God'.<sup>17</sup> For Miller, therefore, the narrator is omniscient, he represents a collective mind -- that of the English Victorian middle and upper classes, and cannot be clearly distinguished from the author, whom he calls 'another God'. Yet, Hardy's narrator does not seem to be completely omniscient.

In *the Return of the Native*, as in most Victorian fictional works, Thomas Hardy prefers the third to the first person narrator. The reason for such a choice is that the Victorian public of readers was pleased with a story, which, though full of those characteristic fictional elements -- pathos, heroes, happy endings, suffering rewarded, etc. -- would be realistic at the same time. Victorians wanted realistic plots, realistic settings, and realistic characters, yet they did not tolerate unhappy endings, since life itself was terrible enough, to have to stand it in their family readings once again.

The third person narrator could, therefore, satisfy contemporaries' need for invented genuineness and realism in the novel. And Hardy's narrator, in fact, does describe what he sees through his eyes, and tell us what the other characters think and feel; he does make comparisons between narrative elements, and underline key-points, often using metaphors to convey a more clear meaning. Yet, he still does not personify Miller's god, since he is neither omniscient, nor impartial, as in our common view a benevolent god is.

In Hardy's novel, the narrator is not only sometimes unreliable about what he states, but he also has very personal opinions about the events, uncertainties about both the happening and the characters' personalities, and in taking sides, in the narrative, as any other fictional character does, he becomes almost one of them. Let us read some examples taken from the novel;

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<sup>17</sup>*Ibidem*, pp.53-90.



When the whole Egdon concourse had left the site of the bonfire to its accustomed loneliness, a closely wrapped female figure approached the barrow...was all that could be learnt of her just now, her form being wrapped in a shawl...(p.50)

Her reason for standing so dead still as the pivot of this circle of heath-country was just obscure...It might reasonably have been supposed that she was listening to the wind...(p.50)

So much is this the case that what is called the play of the features often helps more in understanding a man or a woman than the earnest labours of all the other members together. Thus the night revealed little of her whose form it was embracing, for the mobile parts of her countenance could not be seen(pp.52-3)

This was a small human hand, in the act of lifting pieces of fuel into the fire; but for all that could be seen the hand, like that which troubled Belshazzar, was there alone(p.54).

As it appears from these quotations, the narrator can describe only what he sees through his imaginative eyes, for he presents himself as a mere observer of Eustacia's appearance on the scene. He cannot know everything about the figure, which is making its first step in the narrative, because he is a mere observer. Thus, he lends the reader his eyes and guides him throughout a first presentation of this female character, her movements and visual expressions. The narrator, here, cannot describe Eustacia in her physical aspect, because of the night and symbolic obscurity of the heath, and thus, she first emerges in the novel's world as an indistinguishable entity.

She held the brand to the ground, blowing the red coal with her mouth at the same time... The light raised by her breath had been very precarious, and a momentary irradiation of flesh was all that it had disclosed of her face. That consisted of two matchless lips and a cheek only...(p.53)

She spoke hurriedly, as if her heart had leapt into her throat at the boy's words(p.58)

As far as social ethics were concerned Eustacia approached the savage stage, though in emotion she was all the while an epicure(p.92)

Eustacia, warmed with inner fire ...(p.146)

...a woman came forth from within. She reclined over the garden-gate as if to refresh herself awhile(p.311)

Never was harmony more perfect than that between the chaos of her mind and the chaos of the world without(p.358).

These narrator's words are taken from different moments in the narrative. At the beginning, he thinks of Eustacia in association with precisely chosen parts of her face, or body, which he succeeds in seeing, though the partial darkness of the night, and the total darkness of the heath -- her mouth, her face, her lips, her cheek, her breath, her flesh in the first quotation, then her heart, her throat in the second one. He sees in Eustacia the satisfaction of his imaginary sensual woman, whose best description is contained in the third quotation; she is 'an epicure', in that she researches mostly pleasure and satisfaction. Again, Eustacia warms with 'inner flame', being 'red' her own colour.

In the second last quotation, our female character appears transformed, and the narrator calls her 'a woman', and not Eustacia any more. He is puzzled by this new indistinct

presence, he had already built up his own fanciful personality of Eustacia and cannot recognize her because of her change. The last quotation is taken from a point in the narrative, when we watch Eustacia in her final movements before death. The narrator, here, associates her with natural chaos, and underlines two interesting points through this image; he sees nature in rebellion as Eustacia's mind, yet also in rebellion against Eustacia's choice to be liberated from Egdon.

From these few examples of the narrator's choice of words, we can see that he is not omniscient, nor is he an impartial observer.<sup>18</sup> He sometimes states facts, and merely tells the reader what he sees or what happens in the plot, yet what he reports, as objective happenings, is mainly reality filtered through his own mind and heart, to use a dichotomy dear to Victorians. He interprets the events, Eustacia's personality, and gives the reader the chance to step into his, and not her imaginative world. This narrative voice, therefore, does not give us an account of reality, but projects, upon a description of the fictional world, in realistic terms, his images and his symbols. The narrator cannot describe reality, as reality cannot be anything else but a number of multiple, uncertain, indistinct, and imperfect imaginative interpretations of it.

Eustacia is not the beauty of a fairy tale, whose dreams and aspirations can be presented in a straightforward way, and easily grasped by the reader as a representation of the author's life's views, ideas, or moral pronouncements. She is no 'flat', but 'round' character,<sup>19</sup> as Forster would say, for she possesses a life beyond the writing of her creator, and, like any other human being, belongs to the real confused and confusing world, borrowing her indistinct and obscure nature from this.

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<sup>18</sup>Another example will be the narrator's treatment of Tess.

<sup>19</sup>E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, edited by Oliver Stallybrass, Penguin Twentieth-Century Classics, (London, 1990), pp.169-70.

It is for this reason that Hardy's narrator cannot introduce Eustacia through her name and her physical attributes, but as a 'form' on the Barrow;

There the form stood, motionless as the hill beneath. Above the plain rose the hill, above the hill rose the barrow, above the barrow rose the figure. Above the figure was nothing that could be mapped elsewhere than on a celestial globe. Such a perfect, delicate, and necessary finish did the figure give to the dark pile of hills that it seemed to be the only obvious justification of their outline(p.11).

At the opening of the novel, she is not seen as a woman, but a 'form', an object. This form represents the highest peak of a hill, the barrow, a historical burial, and its 'necessary finish'. Those hills, then, find their reason to be there in this 'celestial', 'delicate', and 'perfect' presence. The narrator here thinks of Eustacia as Nature's child, suggesting further connections, and future development of this announced human dependence on her environment.

As we read in the development of the story, her deep link to the setting of Egdon Heath will be, eventually, fatal. She will constantly move towards the boundaries of her seclusion, in a first optimistic, then desperate attempt at crossing them, yet both times unsuccessfully. On the night of the sixth of November, one year and one day after the beginning of the story, we read;

Extreme unhappiness weighed visibly upon her. Between the drippings of the rain from her umbrella to her mantle, from her mantle to the heather, from the heather to the earth, very similar sounds could be heard coming from her lips; and the tearfulness of the outer scene was repeated upon her face(p.358).

In a touching association with Eustacia's first presentation on the Barrow, in her final act the narrator sees her again in connection with Egdon. Here her clothes

and possessions become part of the heather and earth, rain penetrates her, and, transformed into tears, provides a powerful synthesis of sounds and images. In addition, rain is water that can extinguish Eustacia's 'flame-like' soul.<sup>20</sup> It may represent that 'stagnant water',<sup>21</sup> under which she has lived, and it can be seen as the symbol of purification of a woman regarded as a witch. Eventually, it may be an anticipation of her desperate death.

A seemingly effective correspondence between initial and final images of Eustacia, through the narrator's voice, is represented by these two quotations, the first from the first chapter, the second from the last one;

When the whole Egdon conclave had left the site of the bonfire to its accustomed loneliness a closely-wrapped female figure approached the barrow...was all that could be learnt of her just now, her form being wrapped in a shawl...(p.50)

Venn vanished under the stream, and came up with an armful of wet drapery enclosing a woman's cold form, which was all that remained of the desperate and unfortunate Eustacia(p.377).

The words I have underlined are those which provide correspondence between the two passages quoted from the novel. In the first quotation the narrator sees Eustacia as a woman wrapped in a shawl, in the second, she is only a 'cold form'. The word 'form' reminds us of the opening of the novel, yet, there, the speaker had associated it to both Eustacia's inner warmth and the bonfire. On the contrary, in the novel's final chapter it possesses the quality of death. Eustacia's form is 'motionless', as at her first introduction by the narrator, and it is protected by

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<sup>20</sup> Assuming that the souls of men and women were visible essences, you could fancy the colour of Eustacia's soul to be flame-like', Thomas Hardy, *op. cit.*, pp.63-4.

<sup>21</sup> "That's because you occupy yourself, and so blind yourself to my absence. To me who can do nothing it has been like living under stagnant water", *ibidem*, p.196.



clothes, as in his first image of her. Yet, these garments show opposite meanings. In the first quotation, our female character distinguishes herself from the rest of the heath people; she wears a shawl, because of her refined tastes, which isolation will preserve till her death.<sup>22</sup> Her clothes suggest, therefore, Eustacia's detachment from Egdon, and her never-ending dream to go back to her native place -- Budmouth, or better Paris, where she imagines and dreams herself in fashionable and luxurious dresses.

On the other hand, in the second quotation her dresses have become 'drapery', a word which, though conveying a similar sound, represents the weight of a soaked fabric. The weight is also that of Eustacia's life, which she refuses to carry, as Clym and many others characters in the novel do, in respect for their Christian belief. Yet, the heavy fabric can also be her means for freedom, since it might have caused her to drown in water.

Another parallel, yet contrasting image of Eustacia, given by the narrator, is offered by these two narrative points, one in the middle of the story, the other at the end of it;

This gradual sinking to the earth was in fact one reason why Eustacia had thought that the part of the Turkish knight, though not the shortest, would suit her best. ...But it was easy to die like a Turk, by a dogged decline(p.136)

...she sighed bitterly, and ceased to stand erect, gradually crouching down under the umbrella as if she were drawn into the Barrow by a hand from beneath(p.358).

In order to meet Clym Yeobright, and finally see him, Eustacia becomes an actress in a mummers' play. She chooses the part of the Turkish Knight for the reason given in the first quotation; she is excited by this 'adventure', she

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<sup>22</sup> 'Isolation on a heath renders vulgarity well-nigh impossible', *ibid.*, p.66.



believes in a final change in her life. When the reader is first confronted with this episode, he finds it joyful and funny at a time, yet the narrator's words seem to cover it with a shadow of future sufferings. When we read the first passage quoted, after the enjoyment, we feel uneasy, since what had been a cheerful joke for Eustacia is transformed into a prediction of her death.

Nevertheless, we go further in the story and forget all about it, to remember it again when we read about Eustacia's death. In reading the second passage quoted, we suddenly have the sensation of a *déjà vu*, and after a few seconds we recall the Turkish Knight's death. With an incredible effectiveness, the narrator's words, though completely different, succeed in forming the same moving image of a person sinking slowly to the ground. The *dramatic* death of the unchristian knight, that is, his death in the play (and here we may find place for another point of discussion -- Eustacia's Christian faith), is 'easy' in Eustacia's imagination, yet real death becomes *dramatic* in another sense, that is, desperate and bitter, as reality always is, compared to fantasy.

To conclude this discussion about the narrator's view of Eustacia Vye, we can say that he is not omniscient, as we would expect from a novel's third person narrator, he is not impartial either, as we would expect from a god,<sup>23</sup> but he participates in the story through his eyes and ears, and has a distinctive opinion of Eustacia, like many other characters.

Yet, he is not a fictional character in the full sense, since he does not appear physically in the story but only through his persuasive words, and interpretations of the plot. He has no name, no interactions within the social world of the novel, that is, the novel's characters are not aware of his presence and observations. He looks at those lives, their events, fortunes and misfortunes, and gives an account of them, sustained by his own vision of that world.

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<sup>23</sup>See Miller's interpretation of the narrator's function in Victorian fiction, J. Hillis Miller, *op. cit.*, pp.53-90.

His is an imaginative, partial, and entirely subjective view of reality, whose value is like that of other interpretations offered by other watchful presences in the novel's pages.

#### b) THE COSMOPOLITAN NARRATOR

I have chosen to call 'cosmopolitan narrator' a voice in the novel which resembles the narrator's but also contains echoes from our author's interventions. It is, in fact, a voice with larger interests than the fictional narrator, who is more limited within the restricted boundaries of the Wessex world.

The author, Thomas Hardy in our case, is the material creator of *The Return of the Native*. He is undoubtedly its creator, as he is the person who chooses words and give form to sentences, paragraphs, chapter, and books in the novel. He is the man who, through the act of writing, suggests to his readers his own world, and lets them discover it.

Yet the author's presence in the novel's pages is hardly to be distinguished from the narrator's voice, but for some little particulars, which let us intuitively feel ourselves to be in his company.

If we all, then, agree with the fact that the author is a creator, then he must be omniscient, as his narrator is not. He must know everything about his characters, his creatures, their lives, their destinies, and inner thoughts.

Dale Kramer, in his book *Thomas Hardy. The Form of Tragedy*, says that Hardy's method of characterization is original for his time, in his ability 'to create appropriate concepts of key characters in chapters of set description and evocation, and thereafter to allow essential freedom with occasional allusion to their grander status or with a brief restatement of their symbolic values'.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Dale Kramer, *Thomas Hardy. The Form of Tragedy*, (Detroit, 1975), pp.48-68.

Though I agree with Kramer's statement about the freedom the author gives to his characters, I do not see any key concept in the presentation of Hardy's people, and this because the author appears to be more a participant than an omniscient creator, as also the narrator is. He does leave reading keys throughout the narrative, but these are ambiguous and confusing. As any other novelist does, he guides his readers, but the only hint provided is a contradictory presentation of the created world, so that the reader is left surprised and puzzled. The following quotation is a good example of this;

Had it been possible for the earth and mankind to be entirely in her grasp for a while, had she handled the distaff, the spindle, and the shears at her own free will, few in the world would have noticed the change of government. There would have been the same inequality of lot, the same heaping up of favours here, of contumely there, the same generosity before justice, the same perpetual dilemmas, the same captious alternation of caresses and blows as we endure now(p.63).

It is the use of words like 'we' and 'now' that make us think about the presence of an authorial voice, instead of that of the narrator. Hardy here seems to refer more to his contemporary world than to his fictional story, he appears to be taking a distanced position from the narrative scene to give full voice to the preoccupations of the times.

In the novel's world, anyway, which is one of freedom, Eustacia is offered her 'own free will' to decide about her life. Yet, this freedom is ineffectual, as she, and the author through her, can change neither human nature, nor the world. 'Perpetual dilemmas' and 'captious alternations' will always be there to suggest the existence of a multiple reality, which can be touched, but not grasped, can be lived and experienced, but not understood.

A question, then, seems to emerge; do the novel's characters exist only to convey and sustain Hardy's personal ideas, and opinions about a particular issue, or do they possess a life beyond their author's act of creation? Can the men and women in *The Return of the Native* be compared to real human beings, or are they just puppets, which have been created to represent some ideology?

To have lost the godlike conceit that we may do what we will, and not to have acquired a homely zest for doing what we can, shows a grandeur of temper which cannot be objected to in the abstract, for it connotes a mind that, though disappointed, forswears retreat(p.68).

This is, in my opinion, one of the most important moments in which we can hear the author's own voice, whose presence is again underlined by the repetition of the personal pronoun 'we'. He pronounces these words in his presentation of Eustacia, in the 'Queen of Night' chapter, though he seems to go beyond a simple characterization of the woman. In fact, he is presenting his idea of two contrasting worlds; Victorian and non-Victorian sensitivities.

As we can read from his words, on one hand there are those people who, willingly, adapt their wishes to the circumstances, and renounce the desire to achieve something impossible, and on the other hand, those who cannot submit their will to the course of events, and 'forswear retreat'.

We are immediately forced to make a comparison between the unconventional Eustacia:

She thought...with an ever-growing consciousness of cruelty, which tended to breed actions of reckless unconventionality ... (p.66)

Her instincts towards social nonconformity were at the root of this(p.67),

who rebels but never accepts compromise with life, and Clym, whose blindness makes him change his plans.

Eustacia would represent that 'grandeur of temper', and, therefore, a non-Victorian sensitivity, that is the negation of all that Victorian society represents to the author. Clym would, then, represent the capacity to adapt himself to the laws of evolution, to be able to renounce his utmost wishes, and accept what life has to offer him. No surprise that while she dies, he survives their sufferings.

This quotation, therefore, is a perfect example of how the author can use the characters, Eustacia and Clym in our particular case, to represent his ideology. Yet, and this makes Hardy a great novelist, his characters, though they sometimes embody a particular idea or intellectual position of their author, seem still to exist beyond the author's creation, and like human beings cannot be labelled.

The answer, therefore, to the question whether Hardy's characters are puppets or real beings is not absolute.<sup>25</sup> Some characters (Eustacia, Mrs Yeobright, Clym, Wildeve, for instance) are given the dignity of real active beings, through their acts, choices, feelings, and thoughts. Some others (Thomasin, Diggory, the folk) are mere observers in the story, yet not passive, since they live through their continuing function of watchers, who offer a multiple vision of the more active characters. Yet this distinction does not permit the separation of the novel's men and women into two separate groups, since those who are active become, nevertheless, passive watchers of others' lives, and vice versa. If some characters develop their own personality in time, that is, change themselves during the time progression of the novel, and at the end of the story are completely different from what they were at the very beginning, in the same way other characters modify their own opinions, and at

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<sup>25</sup>As Hardy said in his 'Candour in English Fiction', *New Review*, 2, (January, 1890), he wanted to produce in his character either 'the spurious effect of their being in harmony with social forms and ordinances' or 'by leaving them alone to act as they will, he...[had to] bring down the thunders of respectability upon his head', pp. 18-19. For Rosemarie Morgan, he adopted 'a third course', that was that of 'circumnavigating restrictive conventions and the Grundyists', *op. cit.*, p.5



the end believe in some completely different ideas from before. In the development of the plot some people change their selves by living life's experiences of suffering, joy, love, and all that life can offer to real men. Some others change their imaginative views of reality, and they both contradict themselves, since they cannot be what they were before.

It is, therefore, in terms of *contradiction* that the common ground between the active and passive characters can be found, since those who act, as well as those who watch, are contradictory.

Eustacia for instance is looked at in many ways by the people around her, but she is also thought to be different by the same character at different times in the novel. Let us read some examples;

Whether this romantic martyr to superstition, and the melancholy mummer...were one and the same person, remained as yet a problem(p.181)

'There's reason for ghastliness. -- Eustacia; you have held my happiness in the hollow of your hand, and like a devil you have dashed it down'(p.329)

'I shall not kill you...That would be making a martyr of you, and sending you where she is...'(p.330)

'Don't look at me with those eyes, as if you would bewitch me again'(p.332).

In the first quotation the speaker is the narrator, though he is referring to Clym Yeobright's thought; the other three are words directly spoken by Clym himself. As we can see, each of them has Eustacia as its object of discussion, but, while the last three quotations, which all refer to the end of the novel, present the woman in a negative light, the first one is an opposite view of the same woman. The 'martyr' of the first quotation is associated with

'ghastliness', and becomes 'devil' in the second one, is a 'martyr' again in the third one, but like a negation of that quality, and lastly is transformed into a witch.

Clym Yeobright is, therefore, contradictory in his opinions of Eustacia. Yet, does he contradict himself because the woman has changed, during the course of the novel, or because he -- like any other characters, the narrator, and the author himself -- cannot be sure about how people are? Here something seems to be suggested, that is; absolute truth does not exist.

Clym, like the author, Thomas Hardy, will never be sure about Eustacia's personality. We have already seen the narrator being unable to produce a clear picture of the female figure, nor is the author able to present her as if in a frame, through his creation of other points of views in his characters. Eustacia cannot be immobilized, the more we try to give her and her actions a coherent form, the more she escapes from our control. She is neither a puppet, nor a literary character, that is the author's representation of an ideology, but a real character, and when we deal with reality, as everyone has experienced, things are always boundless and unpredictable.

The author, through the narrator's unreliability, his characters, and their multiple views of reality, appears to tell his readers that it is impossible to restrict reality into limited boundaries, just as it is impossible to define the concept of good in absolute terms. As morality has changed during time, as it has been modified in its relations with religion and faith, so do people change during their lives, days, and moments. The main characteristic of men is the impossibility of being defined in absolute terms, as Eustacia cannot be stopped from her endless movements;

Yet that is what happened. The figure perceptibly gave up its fixity, shifted a step or two, and turned round(p.12)

'Seemingly I can see a fellow of some sort walking round it' (p.27)

...Eustacia...brushed forward...answered with languid calmness artificially maintained (p.58).

The author is, thus, not an omniscient creator, but an active spectator, a participant in the reader's exploration of the text. He shares with him, as with the other characters in the novel, the discovery of ambiguities, contradictory points, changes in perspectives, opinions, and personalities.

#### c) THE IMAGINATIVE OBSERVER

There are two important points in the narrative when the narrator takes his leave to let other eyes watch the novel's scene. This is one of them;

The first instinct of an imaginative stranger might have been to suppose it the person of one of the Celts who built the barrow, so far had all of modern date withdrawn from the scene. It seemed a sort of last man among them, musing for a moment before dropping into eternal night with the rest of his race (p.11).

The quotation introduces an additional observer to the reader for the first time. He is presented at once, and at the very beginning of the story, as an 'imaginative stranger', so as to specify that he is not one of the characters in the novel, nor is he going to perform any particular role in the Egdon drama. Who is, then, this presence, and why is the narrator calling on him?

All we know is that he uses his 'instinct', that he is 'imaginative', and 'supposes' something about what he sees. The narrator had already introduced other observers in the heath landscape; an 'old man' who is going to reveal himself as Eustacia's grandfather, and the reddleman. Yet, those had been of a completely different kind, since they had been

first presented as characters, and then requested as observers of the scene.

This third observer does not appear to be a real man, he is more like a potential observer, more like a creation of the narrator to give his words more credibility, to confirm what he sees and tells us. Yet, this observer does not use his eyes to watch, as most of the characters in the novel do, but his imagination, his instinct. This is a very interesting point, for it declares the narrator's need for an imaginative, and instinctual view of the world. We may, then, think of our narrator as, on one hand, being forced to tell the story in the most credible way, by calling for help on other observers, and, at the same time, as feeling the strong necessity to invoke the presence of imagination.

The unknown observer may, then, be the representative of the narrator's imagination, his way to a subjective interpreter of the events. As the narrator of a Victorian novel, he is requested to give a verisimilar account of what happens, yet he feels the need for a more subjective interpretation of the reality of the fictional world. As the author asks his characters to embody different voices and view-points in the narrative, so the narrator does with his not only *imaginative*, but also *imagined* observer. Both the author and the narrator are compelled to request some help, because the only interpretation of reality is through its multiple and ever-changing views.

This is a second quotation, referring to the 'imaginative' observer;

The imagination of the observer clung by preference to that vanished, solitary figure, as to something more interesting, more important, more likely to have a history worth knowing than these new-comers, and unconsciously regarded them as intruders(p.12).

In these words the observer's imagination represents another of the many views of Eustacia, though what has been suggested in the chapters before is here extremely evident, that is, the different view-points are completely subjective interpretations of Eustacia. The observer uses first his

instinct, as he is drawn unconsciously to choose the lonely 'figure', not yet a woman, among the community of heath people, regarded as 'intruders' in the scene, then he uses his imagination to look at her. And his imagination sees Eustacia as a 'more interesting' and 'more important' being among the others.

A similar position is presented at the end of the novel, when Eustacia has already died, and the narrator says;

The story of the deaths of Eustacia and Wildeve was told throughout Egdon, and far beyond, for many weeks and months. All the known incidents of their love were enlarged, distorted, touched up, and modified, till the original reality bore but a slight resemblance to the counterfeit presentation by surrounding tongues.

...Yet, upon the whole, neither the man nor the woman lost dignity by sudden death. Misfortune had struck them gracefully, cutting off their erratic histories with a catastrophic dash, instead of, as with many, attenuating each life to an uninteresting meagreness, through long years of wrinkles, neglect, and decay(p.385).

As we can see, Eustacia is regarded as an 'interesting' being, even after her 'sudden death', actually because of that, since she will not experience 'long years of wrinkles, neglect, and decay', will remain young, and beautiful in the memories of Egdon people.

Yet, this quotation becomes of great interest when we analyse the words I have underlined; 'enlarged, distorted, touched upon, modified', 'original reality', and 'counterfeit presentation'. Those are all words appropriately chosen to communicate the idea of a distortion of reality by different people who interpret it. The 'surrounding tongues' of the quotation are the Egdon men and women, but not only this. The narrator talks about tongues to convey the idea of a fast spreading of news throughout



Egdon, yet, those tongues speak what the different eyes, we have encountered in the novel, have seen.

The fictional eyes have conducted us throughout the narrative, they have helped us to look at the characters in a different perspective, and at the end of the novel they still convey this idea of a multiple interpretation of the world. The 'original' reality of the quotation actually does not exist, because, as suggested by the author's denial of a precise characterization of his men and women, each interpretation of what is around us, is, like any other, partial. Every view of Eustacia is, therefore, real.

#### d) THE COMMUNITY

Another voice in the novel is composed of all those different view-points of the Egdon community about Eustacia. The community is very various in itself; we find the heath people, who work on the land, Thomasin and Mrs. Yeobright, who are in a certain way detached from the heath, together with some characters whom we could define as outsiders, Diggory Venn, the reddleman, and Damon Wildeve.

They all have different opinions of Eustacia yet, what is more interesting, these opinions alter during the development of the novel's story. There is, in fact, one point in which the *contradictory* treatment of Eustacia comes out with more evidence, and it is left to Wildeve to state it:

'One moment you are too tall, another moment you are too do-nothing, another, too melancholy, another too dark, another I don't know what...' (p.81).

This quotation represents, in my opinion, a good example of the mutability of Eustacia's temperament, together with the inconstant view-points about her. Wildeve uses words like 'one moment', 'another moment', 'another', and 'another', and they all give the reader the idea of change. Eustacia not only is many women all at the same time, since her personality is, like that of all human beings, mutable, but

she is also observed with inconstancy, since man's opinions are contradictory.

Sometimes she represents a 'grandeur of temper', and she is 'too tall' for Wildeve, sometimes she is 'too do-nothing', an opinion also shared by Mrs Yeobright in her words; 'She is lazy and dissatisfied'(p.193). Some other time she is 'too melancholy', as she also regards herself, by telling her grandfather the reason why she has masked herself at the mummers' play; 'To get excitement, and shake off depression...' (p.145).

She is also 'too dark', for Wildeve, one of the most widely shared opinions about the woman's symbolic features:

A profile was visible against the dull monochrome of cloud around her; and it was as though side shadows from the features of Marie Antoinette and Mrs Siddons had converged upwards from the tomb to form an image like neither but suggesting both(p.52)

She had Pagan eyes, full of nocturnal mysteries. ...Assuming that the souls of men and women were visible essences, you could fancy the colour of Eustacia's soul to be flame-like(pp.63-4)

There was a certain obscurity in Eustacia's beauty...(p.87)

'A beauty, with a white face and a mane as black as night(p.268)

Pallor did not include all the quality of her complexion, which seemed more than whiteness; it was almost light. The expression of her finely carved mouth was pleasant -- as if a sense of dignity had just compelled her to leave off speaking(pp.380-1).

Those passages are taken in chronological order from different narrative moments, and are expressions of

different fictional voices. The speaker is the narrator in all quotations, except the fourth one, whose words are uttered by the reddleman.

The narrator associates Eustacia first with shadows and tombs, then, with 'nocturnal mysteries' of other places and times far away from contemporary England, while the third quotation more clearly states what has been suggested, through symbols and images, in the preceding ones. Eustacia is a dark creature, and the reddleman confirms this opinion, adding a sexual symbolic meaning to it, through the woman's connection to a horse.

Yet, almost at the end of the novel, the narrator contradicts himself in his view of Eustacia, by concentrating on her 'pallor', which becomes 'more than whiteness', and eventually 'light'. Eustacia has, through death, lost her sexual impulses and darkness, still represented by her hair,<sup>26</sup> and acquires a new 'dignity', and redemption.

Another equally good example of contradiction in the community's opinions on Eustacia is provided by the following passages;

The mental clearness and power he had found in this lonely girl had indeed filled his manner with misgiving even from the first few minutes of close quarters with her(p.91)

'Both [Clym and Eustacia] of one mind about niceties for certain, and learned in print, and always thinking about high doctrine...' (p.107)

'She is excellently educated; and would make a good matron in a boarding school' (p.193).

As we can see from these quotations, one voice regards Eustacia as possessing 'mental clearness' -- the reddleman's

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<sup>26</sup>'Her black hair was looser now than either of them had ever seen it before, and surrounded her brow like a forest.', Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, p.381.

-- another as being interested in books and high doctrine in association with Clym -- the heath people's -- and another again as being an excellently educated woman -- Clym Yeobright's.<sup>27</sup> All of them agree about Eustacia's intellectual ability and interests, though the narrator many times underlines her unintellectual temperament, and imaginative qualities;

Whenever a flash of reason darted like an electric light upon her lover -- as it sometimes would -- and showed his imperfections, she shivered thus (p.62)

Her power was limited, and the consciousness of this limitation had biassed her development (p.64)

Eustacia's imagination supplied the rest ... (p.116).

We thus find contradiction not only between the community's and the narrator's interpretations of Eustacia, but also within the community itself, whose representatives see her as; 'A woman who seems to care for nothing at all, as you may say' (p.180).

Once again, the thesis of a co-presence of *contradiction* in personality and *contradictory* views of that personality is confirmed. The incoherence and inconstancy pervade both human behaviour and human interpretation of reality. The Egdon community, as well as the narrator, and the author look at Eustacia in a very personal and subjective way; she represents all these views and none of them at the same time, since, through its contradictions, the novel suggests the impossibility of knowing and telling the 'original reality',<sup>28</sup> for this does not exist.

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<sup>27</sup>For D.H. Lawrence Clym Yeobright's vision of Eustacia is completely subjective: '...as soon as he [Clym] got her, she became an idea to him, she had to fit into his system of ideas. According to his way of loving, he knew her already, she was labelled and classed and fixed down.', see D.H. Lawrence, *Lawrence on Hardy: 'A Study of Thomas Hardy'* and 'Introduction to these Paintings', edited by J.V. Davies, (London, 1973), pp.29-30.

<sup>28</sup>Thomas Hardy, *op. cit.*, p.385.

e) EUSTACIA

Our female character presents her particular consciousness about herself, as does any other character in the novel. We have many passages in which Eustacia's voice participates in the definition of her personality. Here are some examples;

'But do I desire unreasonably much in wanting what is called life -- music, poetry, passion, war, and all the beating and pulsing that is going on in the great arteries of the world...?(p.285)

'You have not valued my courtesy -- the courtesy of a lady in loving you -- who used to think of far more ambitious things'(p.79)

'Only in search of events, grandfather...'(p.148)

'I merely lit that fire because I was dull, and thought I would get a little excitement by calling you up and triumphing over you...'(p.61)

'Two wasted lives -- his, and mine. And I am come to this. Will it drive me out of my mind?'(p.259).

In these passages Eustacia presents herself through her dialogues with other people in the novel -- Wildeve in the first, second, and fourth quotation, her grandfather in the third one, Clym in the last quotation.

What we get from her words is the image of a woman who desires 'ambitious things', that is, the 'beating and pulsing' of life. And her desires are truly 'ambitious', for life does not often offer them to man, and nor does it to Eustacia, who left unsatisfied, goes 'only in search' of some 'little excitement', like playing the role of the passionate woman with her secret lover, or showing her power over him. Yet, this is not enough to gratify her, and she thinks of her life as 'wasted', unfulfilled.



After these examples, the reader's opinion about Eustacia is very clear; she is depressed, unsatisfied, her life ruined, unfulfilled. Yet, in the novel some other passages seem to produce an opposite view of the woman:

'At present speak of Paris to me' (p.198)

'Still go on as we do now -- just live on from meeting to meeting, never minding about another day' (p.206).

Here Eustacia shows a completely different personality. In her dialogue with Clym, she seems to care only about the present without worries about her future, she appears to be an 'epicure', a follower of the *Carpe diem* philosophy, as in this quotation from Clym;

'Your sentiment on the wisdom of *Carpe diem* does not impress me to-day' (pp.206-7).

Contradiction again is the key word. Eustacia is both a woman very much concerned about a possible future fulfilment of her desires, and a being living on present satisfactions. This dualism is sustained by another example;

'Why should I not die if I wish?...I have made a bad bargain with life, and I am weary of it, weary' (p.340)

'O how hard it is of Heaven to devise such tortures for me, who have done no harm to Heaven at all!' (p.359).

The contrast between the two quotations can be summarized by a conflict between Eustacia's 'I' in the first passage, and 'Heaven' in the second one. Eustacia is, then, both a fully independent being, who feels entitled to take any decision about her life, and a Christian believer in Heaven -- written with a capital letter. Once she speaks as not having any faith in the Christian god, another time she feels herself to be the object of divine 'tortures', thus, showing an opposite belief.

In my discussion about Eustacia I have tried to show how her characterization is indefinite, through Hardy's use of a multiple perspective. The female character is observed from different points of view, she is watched, spied on, and labelled in an extremely variable way. Not only is she watched by many characters, each one presenting his own point of view, but these characters also change their opinions about her very often.

What emerges is, therefore, a nebulous image of the woman, partly martyr, partly heroine, and partly witch. At the end of the novel we cannot say who she is, neither can any of the other characters, not the narrator, or the author. Not even Eustacia is able to judge herself in a coherent way, as she contradicts herself and changes opinions, like all the other men and women in the novel.

We are confronted with a character who represents the convergence of many ever-changing views about her, but she is all that and nothing of that at the same time, and cannot be labelled, for she does not belong to any human, nor fictional category. She is *unique*.

Since every man possesses a inner self which distinguishes him from the others, man can be said to be unique. Yet, what is unique cannot be put into a category and labelled as the representative of one personality or another, it cannot be judged. Morality becomes, thus, a very loose concept, with no restricted boundaries, nor objective rules of behaviour.

In *The Return of the Native* we can read Hardy's attempt at discovering a new world, where neither morality<sup>29</sup> nor psychological analysis are absolute. As uniqueness distinguishes the modern man, he cannot be judged, nor observed in absolute terms, since absolute truth appears to have collapsed at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Hardy's characters, and Eustacia with them, do not represent only their author's ideology; they exist beyond the pages of the book as human beings, they are unique as the narrator and Hardy himself are. Their views of the world

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<sup>29</sup>The chapter on *The Mayor* will mainly deal with this.

are never definite, since the world is indefinite, and changeable in itself. Truth does not exist as an absolute, and Hardy succeeds in suggesting this modern discovery through his particular technical choice of a multiplicity of points of view.

The use of contradiction becomes one of his means to build up a world where everything is questionable, and uncertain. Eustacia is, thus, not a personage in a frame, but an actress in the perpetual performance of life's drama, that is to say, her modern self is not blocked in a picture, in order to be first described by the author, and then analysed by the reader, but in a continuous *movement* and *change*.

THE NARRATOR AND HIS CHARACTERS IN  
*THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE*

T.H. Huxley in 'The Struggle for Existence: A Programme' (*Nineteenth Century*, 27, (1880)) divided the 'non-ethical man -- the primitive savage, or man as a mere member of the criminal kingdom' from the ethical man, who 'devotes his best energy to the object of setting limits to the struggle' for existence. This separation represented one of the many categories in which Victorians were happy to enclose human personalities.

Yet Hardy was sceptical of this dualistic view of society. If our author, therefore, will in *Tess* put the question on purity and the chance to judge it, in *The Mayor* he tries to underline the problem of morality and its difficult interpretation.

Victorians distinguished clearly between right and wrong: man's duty was well defined and to do right was mainly represented by doing one's duty, to do wrong by neglecting it. Among the many duties of a nineteenth-century man, the care of the family occupied a central place, together with the acquisition and exercise of control upon one's feelings. Conscience was then the daily supervisor and judge of everyman's acts and behaviour.

In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Hardy presents a character, Henchard, who seems to unsettle all ideas about morality, conscience, responsibility, and purity. If, in fact, 'The virtue of purity...in a man is that course of conduct which makes him to be a good husband and father, in a woman that which makes her to be a good wife and mother...',<sup>1</sup> this work anticipates a narrative exemplum of the impossibility of a human division into categories, which in *Tess* will acquire

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<sup>1</sup>See W.K. Clifford, 'Right and Wrong: the Scientific Ground of their Distinction', *Fortnightly Review*, vol. XVIII, (1875), pp.770-800, p.798.

strength because of the presence of a much more discussed female character.

Henchard is, therefore, the man Hardy's readers would readily place outside the clearly-defined category of moral standard: he has sold his wife and daughter, has got drunk, and rarely can be seen to exercise a full control upon his feelings in the novel's story. Hardy creates this character to subvert Victorian certitude about classification and scientific methods of discovering and discussing human personalities, intentions, and moral responsibility.

The author's *stratagem* in this work will consist of an alternation between an *authorial* narrative situation and its opposite: a *figural* narrative situation, so called by theorists of fictional procedure.<sup>2</sup>

Whereas the first represents an *aesthetic* answer to the author's need to narrate, this latter can be seen as an *existential* response of the writer. An aesthetic interest derives from a construction of the fictional world from above, that is the writer stands outside his creation and watches different pieces of a jigsaw, trying to make them coincide in a harmonic picture. On the other hand, an existential compulsion is a real need of an author to give life to his / her fictional characters through the act of writing.

The authorial situation, usually chosen by novelists in the Victorian period, provides a narrative where the author can freely communicate his opinions, ideas, and comments about the world. He gives life to a narrator who tells the story, and refers to the story's characters using personal pronouns of the third person. These characters' lives are, therefore, completely detached from their narrator's existence, they move into their world and are observed, watched from outside, almost from above, since the narrator's perspective on the events is much larger than theirs.

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<sup>2</sup>See F.K. Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative*, (Cambridge, 1984); Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, (London, 1983).



In the figural situation the narrator does not live in an outside universe. He is one of the inhabitants of the fictional world, who talks for them and, like them, possesses a very limited perspective of the happenings, for his position is not one from above, but one *within*. As for the reader, he can never be sure about what is being narrated, there is no authorial voice to assure him of the fundamental facts of the story or thoughts of the characters.

These two different narrative situations can be better distinguished by using the terms *diegesis* and *mimesis*.<sup>3</sup> If the first represents an act of *mediacy* by the narrator, between the fictional world and the reader, the second is the *immediacy* of the characters' communication, which becomes a direct message from a source to a receiver without any intermediacy.

Diegesis is, therefore, the narrator's act of *telling* a story, whereas mimesis consists in the characters' act of *showing* through their dialogues. A diegetic level can also be distinguished from a mimetic one by means of a distinction between *story* and *plot*,<sup>4</sup> two terms which have, in modern narrative theory (Genette, Rimmon-Kenan), supplemented those of 'showing' and 'telling', with a change and extension of their meaning. *Story* becomes an equivalent of diegesis, and refers to the level of 'story reality', while *plot* represents the mimetic level, which is the level of the 'narrator's life and consciousness'.

A continuum of diegesis and mimesis can be seen in all narrative works, as well as in Hardy's novels, when the narrator's presence is more or less evident. *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, as we will also see in *Tess*, presents this continuum of diegesis and mimesis, that is the changing

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<sup>3</sup>For *mimesis* we refer to an act of narrative imitation of reality so as to give the reader the impression of a truthful account of the real world. The term *diegesis* refers to the narrator's intervention and mediacy in the pages of a novel, which thus openly appears to be a work of fiction. For a full definition of these two terms, see Jeremy Hawthorn, *Contemporary Literary Theory*, (London, New York, 1992), pp.41-43.

<sup>4</sup>The term *story* represents a narrative of events arranged in their time-sequence, whereas the term *plot* indicates the organization of incidents and characters in the overall design of a novel.

function of the narrator sometimes *within*, sometimes *outside* his narrated story.

An individual internal relation between *authorial* and *figural* elements can also be found in the novel in the first few sentences of the story.

One evening of late summer, before the nineteenth century had reached one-third of its span, a young man and woman, the latter carrying a child, were approaching the large village of Weydon-Priors, in Upper Wessex, on foot.<sup>5</sup>

The book starts with these words, and there is no chapter heading to introduce them, as it is usually the case with Victorian novels. If in some of his major later novels, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, for instance, Hardy uses an introductory title for a group of chapters, he acts differently this time, distinguishing *The Mayor of Casterbridge* from his other works.

The first words define the *time* of the action; it is the end of a day,<sup>6</sup> at the end of the summer, in the early '30s of the nineteenth century. By this temporal choice, Hardy suggests a somewhat decadent atmosphere -- the feeling of an end, which is, later in the chapter, confirmed by a vivid image of 'extinction'. At the end of this first chapter, we read:

Extinguishing the last candle, and lowering the flap of the tent she left it, and drove away(p.16).

These words refer to the 'furmity' woman, who closes her tent and goes home after a working day; that last candle which has been testimony to Henchard's play -- the selling of his wife and child, has been extinguished; the tent, like the curtains in a theatre, is lowered, and the first act of Henchard's tragedy is over.

Going back to the quotation I started with, we find the immediate definition of the *characters* of the story -- 'a

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<sup>5</sup>Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, edited by Dale Kramer, The World's Classics, (Oxford, 1987), p.5. References to the following quotations are given in brackets.

<sup>6</sup>The day will be more precisely defined later, when the trio encounters a villager, who will say: 'Ay. 'Tis Fair Day', *ibidem*, p.7.

young man and woman', where the use of the indefinite article is fundamental for the definition of the relationship between the reader and the narrator. The story does not begin with a referentless pronoun -- with the introduction of a 'he' or a 'she', whom the reader is supposed to know, or with the use of the familiarizing article 'the', but with the expression: 'a young man and a woman', whom the narrator is expected to present later in the most traditional way. The reader, therefore, expects some explanation from the narrator, who appears, at this very beginning, to be willing to satisfy him.

The choice of the adjective 'young' seems, on the other hand, to be of great importance for the definition, this time, of the main character -- Michael Henchard. He is, in fact, a man of twenty-one, as we get to know later,<sup>7</sup> a man who has married too early and too impulsively, a man who understands the weight of this wrong choice and now wants to free himself from his responsibilities. Yet, the price for his freedom will be even higher than his married life; he will sell his wife and daughter at an auction, fall to sleep and wake up a different man -- a remorseful being for the rest of his life.

The same quotation also indicates the *setting* of at least this first act of the story -- 'the large village of Weydon-Priors, in Upper Wessex'. It will be the background for Henchard's introductory sinful performance, a deed which will influence his whole existence negatively. Once again, the reader is plainly given all the keys for an exhaustive interpretation of the episode; he is not asked to infer a meaning but is guided by the narrator, who presents him with a complete picture with a defined time, setting, and character.

Despite the absence of a chapter heading, this first part of the story seems to suggest the beginning of a novel

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<sup>7</sup>"I, Michael Henchard, on this morning of the sixteenth of September, do take an oath before God here in this solem place that I will avoid all strong liquors for the space of twenty-one years to come, being a year for every year that I have lived", *ibid.*, p.19.

following an *authorial* kind of narrative, since the exact definition of time, setting, and character are elements of that type of narration. Yet, the use of a particular verb form -- the progressive form contained in the expression 'were approaching'-- appears to change our response to the narrator's function. The story is no longer made of words told by a narrator, but it becomes a picture before our very eyes. We, as readers, are no more beyond the pages of the book, but are *in* the pages, as participants of the arrival of this group of people in the village.

The use of the progressive form is a means to shorten the distance between the reader and the story, and it is, of course, an element of that other kind of narrative -- the *figural* one. Yet, this form does not seem to be pervasive throughout the novel, but alternates with its opposite -- the use of the past tense, a form which allows the reader to peep at the narrative scene only from outside. Here is an example of its use:

They were plainly but not ill clad, though the thick hoar of dust which had accumulated on their shoes and garments from an obviously long journey lent a disadvantageous shabbiness to their appearance just now(p.5).

This is the first description of the characters, as they are introduced on the scene, yet, this representation is only external -- apparent, as it results from the use of the word 'appearance'. The 'dust'<sup>8</sup> on their clothes and their 'shabbiness' are the first two elements to represent this

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<sup>8</sup>This is a recurrent image. For other examples, see: 'The grassy margin of the bank, and the nearest hedgerow boughs, were powdered by the dust that had been stirred over them by hasty vehicles, the same dust as it lay on the road deadening their footfalls like a carpet..', *ibid.*, pp.6-7; 'The high-road into the village of Weydon Priors was again carpeted with dust..', *ibid.*, p.21; 'His reinstatement of her mother had been chiefly for the girl's sake; and the fruition of the whole scheme was such dust and ashes as this.', *ibid.*, p.129; 'Haven't I told you o't fifty times? Hey? Making yourself a drudge for a common workman of such a character as hers! Why, ye'll disgrace me to the dust!', *ibid.*, p.132; 'Mrs Henchard's dust mingled with the dust of women who lay ornamented with glass hairpins and amber necklaces...', *ibid.*, p.134; 'The carriages containing the royal visitor and his suite arrived at the spot in a cloud of dust, a procession was formed, and the whole came on to the Town hall at a walking-pace.', *ibid.*, p.265; 'Henchard dusted his boots, washed his hands at the riverside, and proceeded up the town under the feeble lamps.', *ibid.*, p.324.

group of wanderers, coming from nowhere, and arriving casually at the village. The use, here, of the past tense distances the narration from both the reader and the narrator, who start living not *within* but *outside* the story.

If we look carefully at the same quotation, we can observe the presence, at the end of it, of the temporal adverb 'now'. Despite the use of an authorial verbal category, the past tense, in the same sentence the author uses a figural element -- the adverb 'now', which invites the reader into the story once again.

A movement, then, *into* and *out* of the narrative situation can be seen at the beginning of *The Mayor*. The narrator is, sometimes, within the story he narrates, as a participant to the scene, sometimes outside the book, as a mere storyteller, and so is the reader -- an observer from both a long and short distance.

The same alternation between an authorial and a figural narrative situation can also be found at the end of the novel. Here are some of its closing words:

All was over at last, even her regrets for having misunderstood him on his last visit, for not having searched him out sooner, though these were deep and sharp for a good while. From this time forward Elizabeth-Jane found herself in a latitude of calm weather... (p.334)

But her strong sense that neither she nor any human being deserved less than was given, did not blind her to the fact that there were others receiving less who had deserved much more. And in being forced to class herself among the fortunate she did not cease to wonder at the persistence of the unforeseen, when the one to whom such unbroken tranquillity had been accorded in the adult stage was she whose youth had seemed to teach



that happiness was but the occasional episode in a general drama of pain(pp.334-5).

In the first quotation, taken only a few sentences before the end of the novel, we can find elements of both an authorial and a figural narrative situation. First of all, there is no open ending; everything seems to be solved before the closing of the book - and the expression 'All was over at last' is an example of this. The narrator appears, therefore, to be presenting a definite last image of the story, a last picture of it. Elizabeth-Jane's feelings are described, once and forever, as constant; after her life's battles, she has reached a 'latitude of calm weather' which the narrator suggests she will preserve till the end of her days.

Yet, in this fixed and immobile picture, which is doubtless the expression of an authorial kind of narration, something of the opposite narrative situation appears -- the use of deictic<sup>9</sup> elements like 'these' and 'this'. The presence, in fact, of these two words in the sentence lets the narrator jump into the narrative and tell his story from within. The reader, therefore, if first distanced by the use of a past tense ('was') and by a definitive comment about the character's future, is now asked to get closer again to this picture and participate in it.

The second quotation represents the very last words of the novel, and it seems to refer to Elizabeth-Jane's capacity of analysing situations and people.<sup>10</sup> Throughout the novel, we have been spectators of the girl's ability of observation, as it is announced in one of the first chapters:

The desire -- sober and repressed -- of Elizabeth-Jane's heart was indeed to see, to hear, and to understand(p.28).

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<sup>9</sup>The expression 'deictic' refers to *deixis*, which represents 'those features of language which fasten utterances temporally or spatially: 'here', 'now', for example...and play an important role in narrative...' (from Jeremy Hawthorn, *op. cit.*, pp.36).

<sup>10</sup>For a detailed account of Elizabeth-Jane as observer in the novel, see Phillip Mallett, 'An Idiosyncratic Mode of Regard', *op. cit.*, pp.29-30.

Since the very beginning, Elizabeth has distinguished herself by her deep 'desire' to observe other people's deeds, and to understand them. She has shown, therefore, a rather passive attitude towards life, contrasting with characters like Lucetta, Farfrae, and Henchard who have been strongly committed to an active participation in the building up of the story. Let us read some more examples of the girl's different attitude to life:

The position of Elizabeth-Jane's room -- rather high in the house so that it commanded a view of the hay-stores and granaries across the garden -- afforded her opportunity for accurate observation of what went on there(p.90)

A seer's spirit took possession of Elizabeth, impelling her to sit down by the fire, and divine events so surely from data already her own that they could be held as witnessed. She followed Lucetta thus mentally -- saw her encounter Donald somewhere as if by chance -- saw him wear his special look when meeting women...She depicted his impassioned manner; beheld the indecision of both between their lothness to separate and their desire not to be observed; depicted their shaking of hands... It was all true as she had pictured -- she could have sworn it(pp.171-2)

Elizabeth-Jane, being out of the game, and out of the group, could observe all from afar, like the evangelist who had to write it down...(p.182).

These are three quotations taken from different parts of the narrative and all referring to Elizabeth's role of observer from 'afar'. In the first of them, the narrator tells us about the pre-eminent location of her room, which, higher than the others in the house, has a total view upon the happenings of the story. Throughout the novel, therefore,

the girl's favourite position will be that of an accurate observer from both a physical and mental window.<sup>11</sup>

As for the second quotation, her 'seer's spirit' finds confirmation in the episode of Lucetta's meeting with Farfrae, whereas Elizabeth, though wearied by jealousy, does not actively react but limits herself to her imagination, to a mental act, as the narrator describes it. She lets her mind depart from objective 'data', follow her employer (Lucetta), and 'witness' her 'encounter' with Donald. She builds a picture of what happens between them -- of their glances, manners, feelings, and touches; she sees and believes in all this.

The third quotation is selected from an episode in chapter twenty-six, and relates to one of Donald Farfrae's visits to High-Place Hall, Miss Templeman's mansion. Here, while taking some tea, Elizabeth is completely invisible to the other two, absorbed in their first love's plays. She is 'out of the game' and 'out of the group', as the narrator says, yet, because of this strategic position of isolation,

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<sup>11</sup>This is another recurrent image in the novel. For examples of it, see: 'Hearing voices, one of which was close at hand, she withdrew her head, and glanced from behind the window-curtains. ...He came back a few steps, Donald Farfrae opening the window further', Thomas Hardy, *op. cit.*, p.58; 'She looked from the window, and saw Henchard and Farfrae in the hay-yard talking...', *ibidem*, p.97; 'Her husband regarded the paper -- as if it were a window pane through which he saw for miles', *ibid.*, p.126; 'She stoically looked from her bedroom window, and contemplated her fate as if it were written on the top of the church tower hard by', *ibid.*, p.175; 'Her windows gleamed as if they did not want him; her curtains seemed to hang slyly, as if they screened an ousting presence', *ibid.*, p.181; 'In passing he looked up at her windows, but nothing of her was to be seen', *ibid.*, p.199; 'The room in which debtor and creditors had assembled was a front one, and Henchard, looking out of the window, had caught sight of Elizabeth-Jane through the wire blind', *ibid.*, p.219; 'Henchard was more affected by this than he cared to let them perceive, and he turned aside to the window again', *ibid.*, p.220; 'Chancing to look out of the window at that moment he saw a flock of people passing by...', *ibid.*, p.232; 'She seemed to take no pleasure in going anywhere except in her husband's company; and hence when business would not permit him to waste an afternoon she remained indoors, waiting for the time to pass till his return, her face being visible to Elizabeth-Jane from her window aloft', *ibid.*, p.235; 'Night had set in for more than half-an-hour, but she had not the candles lighted, for when Farfrae was away she preferred waiting for him by the firelight, and, if it were not too cold, keeping one of the window sashes a little way open that the sound of his wheels might reach her ears early', *ibid.*, p.277; 'Without waiting for Lucetta's reply she crossed quickly to the window, and pulled out one of the shutters...Again Elizabeth-Jane attempted to close the window...Lucetta herself, saying recklessly "I will see it!" turned to the window, threw up the sash, and went out upon the balcony', *ibid.*, pp.278-9; 'Newson's shadow passed the window. He was gone', *ibid.*, p.293.

Elizabeth can 'watch' and understand, can be a reliable witness of the scene.

Let us now go back to the closing words of the novel, quoted above. It seems to be easier now to understand the meaning of the narrator's words; that great ability she has shown throughout the novel -- her deep disposition to observe objective 'data' of reality -- allows her once again to understand life better than others. Yet, though 'her strong sense' has brought her to believe that we all deserve at least as much happiness as we get and probably more, she is now, in the adult stage of her life, compelled to admit that this is not always the case. Another 'unobservable' force is here discovered by this woman who had always relied on what could only be seen and heard -- and this newly discovered power is 'the unforeseen'. With these last words, therefore, the author, through his narrator, seems to be wanting to suggest the existence and 'persistence' of forces which can be hardly observed or foreseen. Life is neither only a 'general drama of pain', nor only 'a latitude of calm weather', but an unpredictable course of events.

As for the relationship between the authorial and figural aspects of narration, with which I started my analysis, we can doubtless state the presence of a harmonious blend of the two types. Despite the employment of the past tense, an element of the authorial kind, which is usually used to give fixity and certainty to the narrator's words, the whole passage seems to suggest exactly the opposite sensation -- that of uncertainty and instability. If the plot of the novel finds its precise and definite ending in the exposition of Elizabeth-Jane's future -- a future defined 'from this time forward' -- the semantic value of the words used for its conclusion nullifies this same conclusiveness, and opens new spaces to be filled in by the reader.

I will now analyse different elements of the novel in terms of the two types of narrative situations -- the authorial and the figural one.

Starting with the first kind of narration, the *authorial*, which is not the first in importance but the one reproducing a narrative method closer to a past sensitivity -- whereas the *figural* is likely to be found in the modern writer -- we must necessarily begin by an analysis of the kind of narration presented.

This is a *third person narration*, with a narrator whose life is independent from that of the characters, and who tells his story alternating his voice with those of the people in the novel. Yet, their dialogues are rarely very free, since they are, most of the time, guided by our narrator. He leads them sometimes using the *indirect* kind of *speech*, which guarantees reliability about what is being said, and a good selection of information. Here is an example from the novel:

He reflected, and said he would send them the next morning (p.251).

The personal pronouns of third person singular (He ... he) refer to Henchard, that of third person plural (them) to Lucetta's letters to Henchard. The narrator plays, here, the role of mediator between the character and the reader, for he does not let the latter hear the voice of Henchard, in this case, but *mediates* this by his words. This quotation is, in the novel, followed by the line:

'Now don't doubt me,' he added. 'I can keep my word' (p.251).

In this case, we are allowed to hear Henchard's voice by the use of *direct speech*, but the narrator is mediator again, here, with his comment on the character's words.

There is only one case, in *The Mayor*, where the dialogue between two characters, Farfrae and Elizabeth--Jane, is so completely free as to look like a play text:

He. -- 'You like walking this way, Miss Henchard -- and is it not so?' (uttered in his undulatory accents, and with an appraising, pondering gaze at her.)

She. -- 'Oh yes. I have chosen this road latterly. I have no great reason for it.'



He. -- 'But that may make a reason for others.'

She.(reddening) -- 'I don't know that. My reason, however, such as it is, is that I wish to get a glimpse of the sea every day.'

He. -- 'Is it a secret why?'

She.(reluctantly) -- 'Yes.'

He.(with the pathos of one of his native ballads) -- 'Ah, I doubt there will be any good in secrets! A secret cast a deep shadow over my life. And well you know what it was'(p.305).

This is a very original sample of dialogue in *The Mayor*. It is interesting because of its resemblance to a theatrical text, and because of the narrator's intrusion through his ironic comments in parentheses, which look like the guidelines of a stage director. But apart from this exceptional narrative form, the novel develops usually through the more authorial type of indirect speech, and rarely through the direct one.

The narrator is, therefore, a fundamental and central figure in the novel, since we participate in the story through him. He also establishes a close relationship with his hearers, the book's readers, by talking, sometimes, to them directly, as in the following examples:

We now see her in a black silk bonnet...(p.88)

We go back for a moment to the preceding night, to account for Henchard's attitude(p.148)

Let us follow the track of Mr Henchard's thoughts as if it were a clue line, and view the interior of High-Place Hall on this particular evening(p.151)

But we must guard against a too liberal use of the conventional declaration that a great sensation was caused by the prospective event, that all the gossips' tongues were set wagging thereby, and so on, even

though such a declaration might lend some *éclat* to the career of our poor only heroine(p.309)

It was about a month after the day which closed as in the last chapter(p.328).

These are all examples of the narrator's attempt at establishing a personal relationship with his hearers, an attitude whose main consequence is the development of the awareness of narration in the reader. This latter, therefore, will be immediately distanced from the narrated scene, dissuaded from trying to identify himself with the characters, and reminded that the story's events are only fictional.

Another aspect of the same tendency to develop a close connection between the reader and his teller is represented by the latter's disposition to guarantee the indeterminacy of information about the story, as it is told by the narrator:

The history of Susan Henchard's adventures in the interim can be told in two or three sentences(p.26)

While Elizabeth-Jane sits waiting in great amaze at the young man's presence we may briefly explain how he came there(p.64).

These are representative passages of the narrator's assurance of an accurate selection of information; he decides what may be more interesting for the reader, who will then trust him as a reliable mediator. The narrator, therefore, presents to the reader only a small part of the happening, displaying a strong *authorial* and *authoritarian* performance.

As seen in the previous quotations, the narrator plays the role of narrative mediator between the story's characters and the book's reader. He, therefore, represents a diegetic

element<sup>12</sup> which is to be found exclusively in an authorial narrative situation. This work of accurate mediacy is, then, developed through further aspects of the teller's behaviour, that is, his *comments*, his *summaries*, and *omniscience*. Let us look at these more carefully.

As for the narrator's commentary habit, we read:

The truth was that a certain shyness of revealing his conduct prevented Michael Henchard from following up the investigation with the loud hue-and-cry such a pursuit demanded to render it effectual... (p.20)

'The artful little woman!' he said smiling (with reference to Lucetta's adroit and pleasant manœuvre with Elizabeth-Jane.) (p.151)

He hesitated, looked at the chair, thought there was no danger in it (though there was), and sat down (p.158)

If Henchard had only waited long enough he might at least have avoided loss though he had not made a profit. But the momentum of his character knew no patience (p.190)

There is an outer chamber of the brain in which thoughts unowned, unsolicited, and of noxious kind, are sometimes allowed to wander for a moment prior to being sent off whence they came. One of these thoughts sailed into Henchard's ken now (p.307).

These are only some of the many points in the novel where the teller's act of mediacy is more evident. In these quotations he in fact comments upon different things -- upon Farfrae, in the third, and upon Henchard in all the others.

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<sup>12</sup>It is an element of mediacy between the reader and the narrative universe, a filter between the story's reality and the real world beyond the pages of the book.

The first of them presents the narrator as the one to discover and tell the truth about the story's characters and events; he in this case suggests that the reader should read between the lines of Henchard's inability to find Susan and the child, the morning after the sale. For our teller it is the man's temperament which influences the outcome of his search, and not the causality of events.<sup>13</sup>

In the second quotation, the narrator uses a parenthesis to clarify Henchard's intentions in pronouncing what we hear directly from his voice. The teller, therefore, here helps the reader to understand exactly the character's thought; he mediates, once again, working in the receiver's place, and denying thus latter the possibility of a personal inference.

The third of our examples refers to Farfrae and his first meeting with Lucetta. The teller uses a parenthesis again, this time, to anticipate future developments of the story, and at the same time commenting on Lucetta's artful manners. Furthermore, he reveals that he is better informed about the events than his characters, since whereas Farfrae does not see any danger in Lucetta, our teller proves able to foresee it.

That the narrator knows more than his characters is also evident from the second last quotation, where he comments on Henchard's impulsiveness. 'Had he waited...' are the words of someone who can anticipate the events, who can foresee the consequences of an act, and not those of a man who, like Henchard, has to decide and live in the story. The use of 'might', which indicates a kind of doubt about the results of Henchard's possible opposite choice, is here interesting.

The last example represents another of the narrator's intrusions into his characters' minds. He possesses Henchard's brain, here, and shows it to the reader, who can only passively receive what he is given. Yet, in this same quotation, the authorial narrative situation seems to combine with the figural one, through the use of a deictic

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<sup>13</sup>For a full account on the subject of characters' responsibilities, temperaments and destiny in *The Return*, see J.O. Bailey, 'Temperament as Motive in *The Return of the Native*', *English Fiction in Transition*, 5:2, (1962), pp.21-9.

element -- the adverb 'now'. This induces the reader to get into the story, and take part in it, actively this time.

A further example of the teller's obtrusiveness is given by the following lines:

(The fact was that five farmers had already been there on the same errand from different parts of the country.) (p.187).

A parenthesis is used again by the narrator to intervene in the narration with the intention this time of summarizing the events for the reader. He wants to explain everything so that his hearer can better understand the story's episodes without any doubt nor uncertainties. The receiver of the narrative message does not need to interpret, nor use his personal faculties, because he is given everything without any request for participation. He is passively distanced from the fictional scene, and asked to limit himself to being a mere spectator of what happens. Some more examples of the teller's omniscience:

The high-road into the village of Weydon Priors was again carpeted with dust. The trees had put on as of yore their aspect of dingy green, and where the Henchard family of three had once walked along, two persons not unconnected with that family walked now (p.21)

'Their hair gets darker I know -- but I wasn't aware it lightened ever?'

'Oh yes.' And the same uneasy expression came out on her face, to which the future held the key (p.89)

But most probably luck had little to do with it. Character is Fate, said Novalis, and Farfrae's character was just the reverse of Henchard's, who might not inaptly be described as Faust has been described -- as a vehement, gloomy being, who had quitted the ways of vulgar men without light to guide him on a better way (p.115).



The first of the previous quotations reveals our teller's knowledge about the characters who are presenting themselves on the story's scene. He does not, therefore, represent an observer who describes what he objectively witnesses, but he anticipates the happening. He knows the identity of the two people just appearing on that dusty road, and suggests to the reader that their lives are connected to the other three walking on that same road a few pages before.

The narrator does not, then, let the reader have pleasure in discovering the plot, but foresees the events. Yet, as I noticed earlier for another quotation, though this is a clear case of an authorial narrative situation, the presence of the adverb 'now' betrays an alternation with the figural one, represented by this element. The reader is first distanced from the fictional setting by the narrator's behaviour, then invited to become part of it.

The second quotation presents the omniscient attitude of the novel's teller in a vivid way. There is, here, less space left to interpretation, and the meaning is more evident; when he says 'the future held the key', we pay more attention to the episode, and expect to find an answer for Susan's look in the following pages.

The last example is the manifestation of the narrator's capacity of analysing people and things, since he knows that character and not luck is fundamental in the case of Henchard's destiny. He also tells us the substantial difference between this latter and his admirable opponent, for he can penetrate the people's minds and hearts, as no one else in the novel.

A last word on the authorial narrative situation must be spent on an original aspect of Thomas Hardy's work; the narrator's reference to an external observer. Here are some lines from the novel:

Sometimes they might have been seen on foot, sometimes on farmers' waggons, sometimes in carriers' vans; and thus they drew near to Casterbridge (p.28)

One would almost have supposed Henchard to have had policy to see that no better *modus vivendi* could be arrived at with Farfrae than by encouraging him to become his son-in-law(pp.114-5).

The subjects in the first quotation are Susan and Elizabeth-Jane, represented on their way to Casterbridge. Here a new point of view appears -- that of an unknown observer, who does not seem to be real but probable ('might'), and who sees the two women during their journey back to their past, after eighteen years. In the second example, the narrator uses an external viewpoint to impose his judgment upon Henchard's behaviour, suggesting what would be more convenient for him, but what he fails to choose.

In both cases the narrator uses an external and uncommitted observer to justify his comments and opinions, he asks the intervention of another viewpoint to strengthen his choices and positions. Though this observer is not real, the teller still succeeds in creating an atmosphere of adulterated objectivity.

After the analysis of some of the authorial elements of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, I will discuss some aspects of the opposite kind of situation -- the *figural* narrative. If the authorial one is represented by an absence of points of view inside the fictional world, the figural is defined by the presence of them within the story. The characters and the events, therefore, are not presented through the narrator's interpretation, comments and summaries, not through his mediacy, but through an illusion of *immediacy*.

It is an illusion, because the immediate contact between character and reader is nothing but illusory; the narrator, in this specific case, masks his contribution to the development of the narrative, dissimulating his act of mediacy, and presenting directly the character's consciousness to the reader. The reason for such presentation of the inner feelings and thoughts of the people in the story is a request for the receiver's empathy

and participation to the fictional world. The more a character is discovered by a reader, the more this latter will follow his or her destiny with great interest, and be influenced in or against his/her favour.

If the authorial situation is based on the narrative commitment of the story's teller, the figural one is made of a scenic representation of the characters' inner lives. And this is made possible by the use of *direct speech*. Here is an example:

'I began life as a working hay-trusser, and when I was eighteen I married on the strength o' my calling...Well, I lost my wife nineteen years ago or so - by my own fault.....This is how it came about'(p.77).

By this kind of speech we can hear the character's own voice, speaking in the first person narrator, about his own life's story. There is no guide nor intermediacy by the narrator, and Henchard, in our case, is free to expose himself to the knowledge of his reader. The pauses and use of 'Well' are a successful device to let the voice be really human.

A different employment of direct speech is made in the following lines:

'No, no, Elizabeth-Jane -- such dreams are not for you!'(p.113)

'Well, he's a friend of mine, and I'm a friend of his -- or if we are not, what are we?...I liked him so well! And now he's defied me!'(p.113)

In these two quotations the direct speech is used as a kind of soliloquy, because there is no receiver of the message spoken aloud, but only the speaker, Elizabeth-Jane in the first case, Henchard in the second. The two characters, here, seem to talk by themselves, and in doing so, they reveal their personal thoughts to the reader. They unveil their inner lives, letting the public participate in their process of mind.

If direct speech and soliloquy are used to suggest the immediacy of the characters' expressions, another means to the same result is represented by the application of *free indirect* speech and thought. In this case there are no inverted commas, as for the direct speech, but we feel the characters' voices between the lines. Let us have an example:

He said nothing about the enclosure of five guineas.  
The amount was significant; it may tacitly have said to her that he bought her back again(p.69).

These lines present to the reader Susan's reflection on the reception of Henchard's note, containing some money at her arrival in Casterbridge. The exact amount is 'five guineas', the same he had received from Newson, for her sale at the auction in the furmity tent. Yet, if Henchard does not seem to give too much attention to this coincidence, the woman does and shows it through the use of the free indirect thought. Susan, therefore, interprets the man's present not as an attempt to remedy his past act but as a tacit way to 'buy her back again'. In this quotation, with the use of the free indirect thought, we do not have the exposition of the man's intentions, nor the narrator's comments, but only the woman's meditation upon a symbolic act. Here is another example:

Would Mr Farfrae stay in Casterbridge, despite his words and her father's dismissal?...and yet -- would a man who cared one little bit for her have endangered his suit by setting up a business in opposition to Mr Henchard's? Surely not; and it must have been a passing impulse only which had led him to address her so softly(p.112).

In this quotation we hear the voice of another character, Elizabeth-Jane. She talks to herself about Farfrae's behaviour, searching for an answer to what appears a contradiction to her, that is -- his 'care' for her and his 'opposition' to her father. At last, she decides that the man has followed an only temporary impulse in courting her. The free indirect thought, here, allows the reader to

penetrate into Elizabeth's consciousness and discover her personality through her mental process. Some more quotations:

O yes, she knew him, she declared: she could not help knowing almost everybody in Casterbridge, living in such a gazebo over the centre and arena of the town(p.181)

No: there she was -- just coming out from the inner room, the marks of sleep upon her eyelids, and exhibiting a generally refreshed air(p.294)

How this woman divined things. Yet she had not divined their whole extremity(p.297)

He would surely return...Perhaps, after all, Newson was gone for ever(p.300)

What should that present be?(p.323).

The first quotation presents Lucetta's *indirect* intervention in the narrative. Though she does not speak in the first person, we hear her with a voice that represents a compromise between the narrator's summary and the woman's mind; Lucetta is at first introduced by the narrator and then left free to express herself. And her words are pure expression of her worldly personality, who uses her house -- her 'gazebo', to centralize everything.

The following four quotations are all by Henchard, who is the character to whom the narrator leaves more space in the novel. If, in fact, Elizabeth-Jane is one of the people most commented on in the story by the teller, the man is the voice more directly heard, the one with a major number of free indirect speeches or thoughts.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, the narrator will mediate Tess's speeches as he does here with Elizabeth-Jane's.



In the first of Henchard's meditations, which like the following ones is taken from the last chapters of the book, we hear him talking to himself, while afraid to lose his stepdaughter, who unconsciously appears to him 'refreshed' by a restoring sleep. The second of these meditations is on Elizabeth again. The girl can perceive people, things, and situations better than anybody else in the novel, yet here she embodies that innocence and quietness of mind which the man knows was probably lost forever twenty-one years ago, in the village of Weydon Priors. In the third example, Henchard suffers not only because of Newson's appearance, but also because he feels guilty at having been silent about the presence of the man's daughter in the next room. He meditates upon his act, sees no consequences in that, and tries to persuade himself that Newson will never return. The last quotation is one of Henchard's inner questions, where he asks himself about a wedding present for Elizabeth. He desires to buy something symbolic of his repentance and his love for her at the same time, yet, the caged bird he brings to the wedding party and leaves outside the house forgotten in a bush, becomes a vivid symbol of his possessive, careless, and destroying affection.

Another aspect of the figural narrative situation is represented by the use of *objective observers* on the fictional scene. Let us start with the following quotation:

He retired a few steps into the loft, and waited. From this elevated perch his eye could sweep the roofs round-about, the upper parts of the luxurious chestnut trees, now delicate in leaves of a week's age, and the dropping boughs of the limes, Farfrae's garden; and the green door leading therefrom. In course of time -- he could not say how long -- that green door opened and Farfrae came through(pp.270-1).

The objective observer is Henchard, whose eye becomes a camera which zooms on some images which are fundamental for the description of the scene. It is really like an external

and higher point of view flying upon roofs, trees, gardens, and doors. Here is a similar passage:

Applying his telescope to his eye, Henchard expected that Farfrae's features would be disclosed as usual. But the lenses revealed that to-day the man was not Elizabeth-Jane's love(p.310).

This is an interesting example of a technique used in *The Mayor* and other novels by Thomas Hardy, that of 'applying a telescope' to the eyes of one or more characters in the story. Usually only one character is chosen for this employment, but in this novel almost everyone seems to be committed to it. It is Henchard again who watches the fictional scene, becoming a substitute for the reader's eyes; he uses a telescope, this time, which becomes a metaphor for the great objectivity of an instrument against the partial truthfulness of the human eye. If the man's eye is, therefore, expecting to see 'Farfrae's features', the telescope's lenses reveal the presence of Newson; if the human eye is limited by its impressionistic quality, the instrumental eye displays the truth of vision. Some other examples of the presence of watchers:

But, as is frequently the case with hotels of far higher pretensions than the Three Mariners, every word spoken in either of these rooms was distinctly audible in the other. Such sounds came through now(p.46)

In the general sitting-room, which was large, she remarked the two or three dozen strong-backed chairs...the sanded floor -- the black settle which, projecting endwise from the wall within the door, permitted Elizabeth to be, a spectator of all that went on, without herself being particularly seen(p.51)

Hearing voices, one of which was close at hand, she withdrew her head, and glanced from behind the window-curtains(p.58)

The dining-room was almost under her bedroom; she could hear that somebody was admitted there, and presently the indistinct murmur of a person became audible(p.246).

In the previous cases there is always a physical obstacle -- a hotel's room, a sitting-room, some window-curtains, or a dining-room -- to protect the human eye or ear in its attentive work of watcher or hearer. The most interesting thing here is that only women appear to be able to spy on other people -- Susan and Elizabeth in the first quotation, Elizabeth again in the second and third quotation, Lucetta in the last one -- when for men we read:

After some broken words which Henchard lost she added...Henchard did not hear the reply; he might have done so and much more, but he did not care to play the eavesdropper(p.195).

If women, especially Elizabeth, can play the role of the main hidden watchers in the book, men like Henchard, for instance, cannot be described as such.<sup>15</sup> When he, or another male character hears some private conversation, or watches others, most of the time women walking in the street, as in the following lines:

He [Henchard] watched her up the street, and turned into his house(p.75)

Farfrae walked slowly after, looking thoughtfully at her diminishing figure...(p.95)

He [Jopp] watched her till she had vanished, and then went home(p.252),

the narrator usually underlines the casualness and spontaneity of the man's act, by not providing him with a protective screen from where to observe unobserved.

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<sup>15</sup>The Victorian double-standard plays a part here.

If the different watchers on the novel's scene are mostly reliable, because they objectively report what they see, there is one point in the novel, where the vision is not the result of the eye's activity, but that of the mind. Let us read this original passage:

...the silence in Casterbridge...was broken in Elizabeth's ear only by the timepiece in the bedroom ticking frantically against the clock on the stairs; ticking harder and harder till it seemed to clang like a gong; and all this while the subtle-souled girl asking herself why she was born, why sitting in a room, and blinking at the candle; why things around her had taken the shape they wore in preference to every other possible shape; why they stared at her so helplessly, as if waiting for the touch of some wand that should release them from terrestrial constraint; what that chaos called consciousness, which spun in her at this moment like a top, tended to, and began in. Her eyes fell together; she was awake, yet she was asleep(p.119).

The point of view, now, is Elizabeth's ear, the most receptive one in the story, which takes a start from an external noise -- the ticking of the time-piece in the bedroom -- and amplifies it till it becomes the voice of the woman's mind. So we hear her 'asking herself' many existential questions about her life and the appearance of things, then exploring the nature of her consciousness, which she can only identify with 'chaos'.

Her chaotic mind is, therefore, one of the viewpoints in the novel; yet, if the fictional eyes and ears appear to be intentionally objective in the particular and well-defined observation of the objects around, the mind is not but subjective and it can only produce a partial or personal vision of reality. The approach to the stream of consciousness technique begins, here, to be in evidence.

With the presence of such numerous points of view in the story, the narrator loses his predominant position on the narrative, and becomes less omniscient, showing sometimes a limited knowledge of the events. Here are some examples for this aspect:

After two or three days of solitude and incessant rain Henchard called at the house(p.203)

...she would not have acted as she did when she met Henchard by accident a day or two later(p.243)

What, and how much, Farfrae's wife ultimately explained to him of her past entanglement with Henchard, when they were alone in the solitude of that sad night, cannot be told....to what extent she spoke of these things remained Farfrae's secret alone(pp.288-9).

The first two quotations are exceptional in a novel like *The Mayor*, where there is such great attention to temporal dimension and relations. Yet, the narrator appears uncertain about time; he cannot say how long Lucetta's period of solitude is, nor when she has met her former lover by chance. Above all, there is indeterminacy, and the teller loses his function of controller. The last passage is even more significative because of a clear statement about the impossibility of knowing his characters' secrets.

Our narrator cannot dominate the characters' lives, he cannot discover or foresee their private talks or movements, so he must resign his role of guide and limit himself to observation.

*The Mayor of Casterbridge* is a novel which attracts the reader for its pervasive and suggestive image of time, which, passing quickly away, leaves the man no moment to pause and think.<sup>16</sup> Time, in fact, is one of the main

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<sup>16</sup>The setting is also very particular in the novel. For William Greenslade (op. cit., p.54): 'In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*...a complete landscape, new to Victorian



characters in the story, the ruler of the novel's plot, the one who regulates the rhythm of the life in the modern town of Casterbridge.

The story begins on the fifteenth of September, with Henchard's sinful act of sale of both his wife and child. After the trio has arrived in town and entered the 'furmity tent', after the man has opened the auction and started his game, we read:

But a quarter of an hour later the man, who had gone on lacing his furmity more and more heavily, though he was either so strong-minded or such an intrepid toper that he still appeared fairly sober, recurred to the old strain...(p.12).

'A quarter of an hour later', the game is revealed to be the real intention of a drunk man, who is encouraged by alcohol to dare free himself from a wrong past choice, that of his juvenile marriage. The morning after, then, he says:

'I, Michael Henchard, on this morning of the sixteenth of September, do take an oath before God here in this solemn place that I will avoid all strong liquors for the space of twenty-one years to come, being a year for every year that I have lived' (p.19).

As it is clear from this quotation, the man's life is dominated by a deep consciousness of time, days, and hours. By his solemn oath, Henchard tries to condemn himself to a sort of punishment, that of rationalizing every future choice, that is, to stop and think before acting impulsively. He believes time can cancel what he has done with his life, he thinks 'twenty-one years' to be sufficient to forget and be forgiven, yet his act cannot be undone. Later in the novel, we read:

'But what are you going to do to repay us for the past?' inquired the man who had before spoken...'If

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fiction, made the "urbanising" of rural life show through. It is a landscape shaped by a construction of difference; by a magnification of divisions between the normative and the "other", marking out boundaries between the healthy and the polluted, the respectable and disreputable, between the "official" and subversive class formations and social groups, and the prospect of these boundaries being transgressed. Such meanings shape Hardy's representation of the social space of "Casterbridge", his *urbs in rure*.'

anybody will tell me how to turn grown wheat, into wholesome wheat I'll take it back with pleasure. But it can't be done' (p.38).

In his life he learns that, as the past cannot be revisited and adjusted with knowledge of the future consequences of his decisions, so he cannot nullify what he has done on that fifteenth of September.

Time appears again, when Susan and Elizabeth-Jane arrive for the first time in Casterbridge:

It was on Friday evening, near the middle of September, and just before dusk, that they reached the summit of a hill within a mile of the place they sought (p.29).

The same part of a month ('near the middle'), the same month ('September'), the same part of a day ('evening') of that first day described at the beginning of the novel; the important arrival of Henchard's wife and her daughter in Casterbridge appears to match the day of that fundamental decision in the man's life. Eighteen years have passed between the two days, but for both Henchard and the reader only one night: the past, dressed up in black, as the two women are, lives again in Henchard's conscience.

Susan and Elizabeth-Jane, then, enter the town, and:

From this tower the clock struck eight...In a few minutes business at Casterbridge was ended for the day (p.31).

The tower's clock strikes 'eight' -- it is late evening, every shop closes, every activity stops 'in a few minutes', life in Casterbridge seems to be suspended to leave place to a ghastly re-visitation of Henchard's past.

Henchard thinks he is offered the exceptional chance of undoing his past and wants to take a remedy to his terrible act at last, by marrying Susan again and adopting the one he believes to be his real daughter. We read:

A MARTINMAS summer of Mrs. Henchard's life set in with her entry into her husband's large house and respectable social orbit, and it was as bright as such summers well can be (p.87).

Here we have the presence of precise time again: not only Susan's late summer, but, above all, Henchard's last moment of 'bright' hope in a purified existence.<sup>17</sup>

Let us read on:

The morning came. ...it was too late to modify or postpone...At twelve o' clock the rain began to fall...but by three o' clock Henchard discerned that his project was doomed to end in failure...But towards six the storm abated...(p.105).

This quotation refers to the organization of public celebration in Casterbridge made both by Henchard and Farfrae, and ended with the failure of the former and the success of the latter. It is very interesting to note what an important role is played by time in this case; in fact, it seems to summarise Henchard's whole doom. 'The morning' is that of the sixteenth of September, when he cannot 'undo' the selling of his wife and daughter; 'at twelve o' clock' of his life, because of Susan's death, he sees the vanity of any attempt at modifying his past; 'by three o' clock' he discovers that Elizabeth-Jane is not his daughter; 'towards six', which represents the end of Henchard's life, he becomes an 'outcast and vagabond'.<sup>18</sup>

Let us read some other examples of this predominance of time throughout the novel:

But the proposal had come ten minutes too late(p.146)

'Business ought not to be neglected, ought it?'

'Not for a single minute'(p.163)

'Can you tell me the time, ma'am?' he asked.

'Yes,' she said hastily; 'half-past four'(p.237)

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<sup>17</sup>See Elizabeth-Jane and Donald's wedding on Martin's Day: "...Surely they said a wedding was coming off soon - on Martin's Day?", Thomas Hardy, *op. cit.*, p.321.

<sup>18</sup>'...I - Cain - go alone as I deserve - an outcast and a vagabond. But my punishment is not greater than I can bear!', *ibidem*, p.313.

A royal personage was about to pass through the borough, on his course further west to inaugurate an immense engineering work out that way. He had consented to halt half-an-hour or so in the town...(p.262).

These are some quotations taken from different points in the story, and they all convey a sense of the great importance given to the passing of time, which is, sometimes, associated to business activities. The first one refers to Henchard's attempt at marrying Lucetta, who has lost no time in waiting for him, but has started her love story with Farfrae; the second one is part of a dialogue between Farfrae and Lucetta at their first meeting; the third is an exchange between Henchard and Lucetta, now Donald's wife; and the last one refers to the short visit of a 'royal personage' in Casterbridge. All of them suggest that life in Casterbridge has been centred on action, whose quality seems to be represented by its speed; no time is left, then, to meditation. Henchard's impulsiveness is a striking example of this condition of mind which guides the man to act immediately in order to save time and energy.

Lucetta wants to start living again, and after Henchard's delay, cannot wait further but has to find another object for her admiration and love. On the other hand, Farfrae, though fascinated by the woman, cannot reserve his time to her, but has to concentrate on his business, which is above all other things, even above love. The coming of the 'royal personage', who can visit Casterbridge only for a few minutes, is, then, representative of a whole world beyond that town and its railway. That peer, like any other man inside and outside Casterbridge, cannot stop and think, but only go on acting, no matter what results.

A confirmation of such interpretation comes from another quotation:

On that day -- almost at that minute -- he passed the ridge of prosperity and honour, and began to descend rapidly on the other side(p.218).

Henchard's life is like a sundial, and the discovery of his past by the people in Casterbridge signs the 'twelve o' clock' of one of the previous quotations with the beginning of an existential afternoon and, then, an evening. After his social and economic death, Henchard gives up living a life of wrong choices, and, in one of the last pages of the novel, we read:

'He's just gone -- about half-an-hour ago, by the sun; for I've got no watch to my name' (p.332).

The speaker, here, is Abel Whittle, the only testimony of the man's death. The most interesting thing here is that the watch which had dominated all the relationships in the story has now disappeared to leave its place to the sun, that is, to a more natural rhythm. If, only a few pages before, another death had been easily stated with reference to a precise time:

'You've heard, I suppose, of poor Doctor Chalkfield's death? Yes -- died this afternoon at five,' said Mr Vatt (p.242),

the same cannot be done for Henchard's, because, by his retreat to the woods, he has renounced taking part in a world ruled by the time and laws of business.

I would like to end this essay by quoting one of the most impressive passages in the novel:

A smear of decisive lead-coloured paint had been laid on to obliterate Henchard's name, though its letters dimly loomed through like ships in a fog. Over these, in fresh white, spread the name of Farfrae (p.221).

The life and death of a man like Henchard seems to be synthesized in these lines; his name can be cancelled from life, as in the memory of those he loved and destroyed for too much affection, a 'fresh white' painted name can take its place, yet the old letters, though shady and agonizing, are still dominating, as the man did throughout his existence.



## TESS AND THE TELLER

Women's sexuality was a prominent theme in late-nineteenth-century fiction; it caused a great deal of controversy because of rigid norms of behaviour imposed upon women together with a belief in the asexual nature of the female human species. A categorization, therefore, was working again against women's free choice and right to express themselves.

Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is an ambitious attempt at facing such problems of female identity, female choices and independence. It is for this reason that the fictional work has been often assimilated to the genre of *sex novels*. For David Trotter,<sup>1</sup> in fact, 'Tess provokes a typifying sexual response in every man who sets eyes on her, including the narrator's'.

Similar positions have been shared by several critics in the past years;<sup>2</sup> yet not only by them but also by common readers who have often elected this novel above the others by Hardy because of this detailed, almost voyeuristic description of our heroine.

As early as December 1892, D.F. Hannigan wrote in the *Westminster Review*: 'There is no coarsness in it, no nastiness of detail, and yet nothing essential is avoided...We can follow her career as if we knew her and lived with her. We feel her sufferings; we respect her shortcomings; we lament the chain of circumstances that led to her doom; and finally, we forgive and pity her.'

This female character, therefore, easily and rapidly attracted the readers' and the critics' attention. Some of them felt Hardy might have better not described his heroine in such physically explicit terms, some others welcomed

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<sup>1</sup>David Trotter, *op. cit.*, p.199.

<sup>2</sup>See Penny Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women*, (Brighton, 1982).

positively this new kind of character's representation. All of them, anyway, were attracted by Tess.

Most of the critical studies on this novel, in fact, are focused on the female character, her personality, and representation.<sup>3</sup> And Hardy's representation of Tess is mostly physical:

She had not heard him enter, and hardly realized his presence there. She was yawning, and he saw the red interior of her mouth as if it had been a snake's. She had stretched one arm so high above her coiled-up cable of hair that he could see its satin delicacy above the sunburn; her face was flushed with sleep, and her eyelids hung heavy over their pupils. The brim-fulness of her nature breathed from her. It was a moment when a woman's soul is more incarnate than at any other time; when the most spiritual beauty itself bespeaks itself flesh; and sex takes the outside place in the presentation.<sup>4</sup>

Here we have Tess's representation through a large use of verbs and nouns which indicate her physical substance. Tess has not heard Angel enter as she ignores the narrator's and the readers' presence in the pages of the novel. We can thus hear her, see her, and also enter her private identity of woman. Her 'red mouth' is a way to discover her and possess her at the same time with voyeuristic curiosity.

We can feel her 'red' throat, her eyelids, her pupils, her hair, her face, therefore, all her flesh, her being a woman watched by male observers. We know Tess perfectly well in her feelings and sensations, and we like her mainly because

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<sup>3</sup>See Kathleen Blake, 'Pure Tess: Hardy on Knowing a Woman', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 22, (1982), pp.689-705; Kristin Brady, 'Tess and Alec: Rape or Seduction?', in *Thomas Hardy Annual no.4*, edited by Norman Page, (London, 1986), pp.127-47; Janet Freeman, 'Ways of Looking at Tess', *Studies in Philology*, 79, (1982), pp.311-23; Mary Jacobus, 'Tess's Purity', *Essays in Criticism*, 26, (1976), pp.318-38; Robert C. Schweik, 'Moral Perspective in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*', *College English*, 24, (1962), pp.14-18.

<sup>4</sup>Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, edited by Juliet Grindle and Simon Gatrell, *The World's Classics*, (Oxford, 1983), p. 172. References to the following quotations are given in brackets.

of this, yet her character and personality appear to be extremely fugitive and indefinable.

The woman Hardy describes with physical exactitude is the same character he refuses to typify and close within Victorian categories; by means of different functions employed by his narrator, and an excellent use of different points of view, our author gives us a final image of Tess as a character free from any kind of definition, as a unique being, difficult to enclose within a claustrophobic scientific, or cultural category.

In this novel, therefore, the writer seems to use both types of narrative situation: the authorial and the figural one,<sup>5</sup> alternating between the employment of a teller and the representation of more immediate fictional voices, those of the characters in the story. Let us begin an analysis of this novel by looking at those narrative moments when Hardy's narrator appears to be more omniscient and intrusive about the characters' lives and minds. Here are some quotations taken from different points in the narrative:

...he was not thinking of anything in particular(p.43)

...he dismissed the subject from his mind(p.23)

Pedigree, ancestral skeletons, monumental record, the d'Urberville lineaments, did not help Tess in her life's battle as yet, even to the extent of attracting to her a dancing-partner over the heads of the commonest peasantry(pp.22-3)

...Tess Durbeyfield did not divine, as she innocently looked down at the roses in her bosom, that there behind the blue narcotic haze was potentially the "tragic mischief" of her drama...(p.45)

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<sup>5</sup>For an explanation of the terms used, see chapter on *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

...she went her way without knowing that the greatest misfortune of her life was this feminine loss of courage at the last and critical moment...(p.291) ,

...she hardly observed that a tear descended slowly upon his cheek, a tear so large that it magnified the pores of the skin over which it rolled, like the object-lens of a microscope(p.228).

These are all examples of the narrator's large perspective upon the events and the characters' minds. He appears to be omniscient -- he knows everything about the present and is able to foresee the future, he stands above the story and perceives every little change in men's thoughts. The first quotation is from the very first page of the novel; here the object of the narrator's interest is 'Sir' John Durbeyfield, Tess's father, whose mind, at this point, seems to be completely controlled by the story-teller. This is one of the novel's minor characters, who, at the opening of the narrative, is presented walking home from work, yet we do not only observe him from outside in his movements, but can penetrate his thoughts and discover that his mind is not particularly concentrated on anything. The absent-mindedness of this man will be underlined later in the novel, representing one of the causes of his family's economic ruin, but at the beginning of the story the reader does not know all this and the present quotation only encourages him to trust the narrator, who seems to be reliable, because of his powerful external perspective upon the story.

The second quotation refers to Angel Clare, after he has danced on May-day on those fields he was passing by together with his brothers. The 'subject of his mind' is Tess, only a girl in a white gown now, and the narrator can here again show his complete knowledge of Angel's thoughts and attention.

The third, fourth, and fifth quotations appear in different parts of the narrative but they all convey the sense of a teller who dominates Tess's life. The woman does

not know what he does about her present and future existence; she will have to fight a battle in her life, though she will never succeed in understanding that 'blue narcotic haze', nor her 'feminine loss of courage at the last critical moment', which the narrator thinks to be some causes for her 'misfortune'. The landscape and atmosphere of her dramatic life is usually described in different tones of blue,<sup>6</sup> a dreamy air which helps her to fall into oblivion and, forgetting her miserable existence at home, believe herself to be different.

The last quotation, then, does not concentrate on Tess's ability to 'divine' her future, but on her capacity of observation. The narrator is not only better than his characters at understanding situations and inner processes of mind, but he is also a better observer, and can perceive something which others cannot. In this case he can see what Tess fails to do; Angel's tear falling 'slowly upon his cheek', and his 'pores' being 'magnified' by it. We cannot avoid thinking that, if the woman had noted Angel's distress, her decisions and, consequently, the story's ending would have been different.

As we have seen in the above words, the novel's narrator is omniscient and intrusive, yet not always so. Let us read the following quotation:

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<sup>6</sup>See other narrative points where the blue colour dominates in the description or contrasts other colours like a yellow atmosphere, or the red mansion of the d'Urbervilles: 'Not a soul passed that way for a long while, and the faint notes of the band were the only human sounds audible within the rim of blue hills', *ibidem*, p.17; 'The atmosphere beneath is languorous, and is so tinged with azure that what artists call the middle-distance partakes also of that hue, while the horizon beyond is of the deepest ultramarine', *ibid.*, p.18; 'It was a fine September evening, just before sunset, when yellow lights struggle with blue shades in hair-like lines...', *ibid.*, p.65; 'They saw tiny blue fogs in the shadows of trees and hedges, all the time there was bright sunshine elsewhere', *ibid.*, p.194; 'During the halt Tess's eyes fell upon a three-pint blue mug...', *ibid.*, p.347; '...the house proper stood in full view. It was of recent erection indeed almost new, and of the same rich red colour that formed such a contrast with the evergreens of the lodge. Far behind the corner of the house -- which rose like a geranium bloom against the subdued colours around -- stretched the soft azure landscape...', *ibid.*, p.41; 'It was a Sunday morning in late October ... The time was not long past daybreak, and the yellow luminosity upon the horizon behind her back lighted the ridge towards which her face was set...', *ibid.*, p.81; 'It was a fine September evening, just before sunset, when yellow lights struggle with blue shades in hair-like lines...', *ibid.*, p.65; 'Mere yellow skeleton that he was now, he felt the contrast between them, and thought his appearance distasteful to her', *ibid.*, p.365.



Tess had never in her recent life been so happy as she was now, possibly never would be so happy again(p.133). Though he still appears to dominate the narrative, some words like 'now' and 'possibly' are introduced to give new meaning to his expression. The adverb of time 'now' helps the reader to move from the narrator's point of view into the fictional world, that is from an outside to an inside viewpoint; the adverb 'possibly' invites us not to take for granted everything the narrator says, and it gives strength to any possible change, since unpredictability makes its appearance. The authorial situation begins to vacillate and give place to a different kind of narrative construction; the reader is led from an external perspective into an internal one, that is, the character's stand-point. Here are some words which communicate a change in our narrator:

...his age could not be more than three- or four-and-twenty(p.43)

On a thyme-scented, bird-hatching morning in May, between two and three years after the return from Trantridge -- silent reconstructive years for Tess Durbeyfield -- she left her home for the second time(p.107)

...something had occurred which changed the pivot of the universe for their two natures... A veil had been whisked aside; the tract of each one's outlook was to have a new horizon thenceforward -- for a short time or for a long(p.154).

All three quotations suggest that the teller's job has changed; he is no more omniscient, but uncertain. The author, Thomas Hardy, is no longer interested in the coherence and cohesion of his plot, he does not want to sacrifice a possible inner perspective on the novel's characters, in the name of a perfect, but sterile creation. The reader is no longer assured about the economy and

essential accuracy of the narration, he is asked to perform a more active role, that of an interpreter who has to read between the lines. Indeterminacy and limited knowledge are new aspects of this figural situation, as we can see in the following words:

Upon her sensations the whole world depended, to Tess: through her existence all her fellow-creatures existed, to her. The universe itself only came into being for Tess on the particular day in the particular year in which she was born(p.158)

This consciousness upon which he had intruded was the single opportunity of existence ever vouchsafed to Tess by an unsympathetic first cause; her all; her every and only chance(p.158).

The narrator leaves his place to the main character, Tess, whose 'sensations' and 'consciousness' become the reader's stand-point, from which to analyse and comprehend the fictional reality. The world around Tess comes into existence at the moment of her birth, nothing exists before then, because it is she who gives things and beings their places and order in a fully subjective universe. Her 'consciousness' is her only chance to live and oppose 'an unsympathetic' vacuity; both Tess's ability to feel and knowledge of her sensations are 'her only chance' to exist, her 'single opportunity' to be.

Tess's point of view, therefore, becomes the reader's one. It is limited and subjective; since the character lives within the story and not outside the story, as the narrator does, it offers interpretations of reality, asking the reader to complete them, and leaves areas of indeterminacy behind it. The use of letters<sup>7</sup> and notes in the novel is one way, maybe the most traditional one, to convey this impression of immediacy, since they really make us hear the

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<sup>7</sup>For one example, see *ibid.*, p.192.

characters' voices, and penetrate their minds. Yet, the inside point of view is better explored differently:

From the holiday gaieties of the field -- the white gowns, the nosegays, the willow-wands, the whirling movements on the green, the flash of gentle sentiment towards the stranger -- to the yellow melancholy of this one-candled spectacle, what a step!(p.25)

We have no doubt it is Tess's thought here, and it is interesting to note the complete absence of verbs, and the final exclamation mark which points out the girl's mental process. We read her contrasting images of the fields and of her home; she has been experiencing the happy dances, she has met Angel for the first time, but going back home, and entering her house she feels distressed again by the 'yellow melancholy' of her family's oppressive and oppressed existence. Here the colours are expressions of different sensations; Tess's inner existence is 'yellow', as lighted by a last dying candle, the dances and happiness are 'white', like her gown, and the fields are 'green'. Yet:

...Tess felt it with a dreadful sting of remorse -- the very white frock upon her back which she had so carelessly greened about the skirt on the damping grass -- which had been wrung up and ironed by her mother's own hands(p.25).

The first instance of Tess's remorse is her 'white frock', which she has 'so carelessly greened' on the grass, during the dances. The symbolic significance of this scene is easily understood by confronting with this, Tess's continuous sense of guilt after her sexual intercourse with Alec; she will always feel dirty, in contrast with the spotless perfection and purity of Angel Clare, whose names could have not been better chosen.

This is not, of course, the author's first presentation of Tess, she is introduced to the reader in the second chapter (page 20) when we read:

...one of the women said:

'The Lord-a-Lord! Why, Tess Durbeyfield, if there isn't thy father riding hhome in a carriage!' (p.20)

'He's tired, that's all,' she said hastily... (p.20)

These sentences are both in direct speech directed by the narrator's interventions through his use of 'said'; the first quotation represents the introduction of Tess Durbeyfield on the narrative scene, the second is the first time we hear her direct voice. Only a few words associate her to the drunk John Durbeyfield, in contrast with her name in the title of the novel, and to convey both her feelings of shame and pride, whose strength is strongly represented by the recurrent adverb 'hastily'.<sup>8</sup>

If direct speech is used to present Tess, the same is done for Angel Clare a few pages further:

'What are you going to do, Angel?' asked the eldest (p.22)

'I am inclined to go and have a fling with them. Why not all of us -- just for a minute or two -- it will not detain us long?' (p.22)

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<sup>8</sup>For other examples, see :

'Meanwhile Tess had hastily dressed herself...', *ibid.*, p.34; 'Having at last taken her course Tess was less restless and abstracted...', *ibid.*, p.50; 'He hastily bade them farewell...', *ibid.*, p.148; 'I have hastened back so soon, because of you!', *ibid.*, p.172; 'With the woman's instinct to hide she diverged hastily...', *ibid.*, p.196; 'Clare, feeling then that he had been too hasty...', *ibid.*, p.207; '"I don't know", she said hastily, with tears in her accents', *ibid.*, p.237; 'He did not avail himself of the invitation, saying as he turned hastily aside, - "I shall be home punctually"', *ibid.*, p.238; 'Tess hastily explained that he had been called away on business...', *ibid.*, p.250; 'A hastily prepared supper was brought in...', *ibid.*, p.256; 'Marian...had hastened to notify to her former friend that she herself had gone to this upland spot after leaving the dairy...', *ibid.*, pp.268-9; '...a regret for his hasty judgement began to oppress him', *ibid.*, p.329; 'He hastily opened the letter...', *ibid.*, p.356; 'Whilst he was hastily packing together a few articles for his journey, he glanced over a poor plain missive...', *ibid.*, p.358; 'Clare received directions how to find the house, and hastened thither, arriving with the milkman', *ibid.*, p.364; 'Up this road from the precincts of the city two persons were walking rapidly, as if unconscious of the trying ascent...', *ibid.*, p.383.

As with the woman, Angel is first presented indirectly through another character's words, the eldest of his brothers in this case, then through his own words. Yet, whereas in the first quotation the brother's speech is directed by the narrator ('asked'), the second quotation is an example of direct speech without any teller's intervention. Angel, therefore, is left free to express himself, while Tess still needs the narrator's guide to intervene upon the scene.

Another similar discrepancy of treatment can be observed in the different ways the two characters, in the middle of the story, make their confessions about the past:

...she entered on her story of her acquaintance with Alec d'Urberville and its results, murmuring the words without flinching, and with her eyelids drooping down(p.222)

Her narrative ended...(p.225).

These are the words used by the narrator to tell us that Tess has narrated her sad story to her husband. We know her past already and no more time needs to be wasted in hearing her voice; the narrator's principle of economy is here applied. One chapter ends and another begins between the first and second quotation, to give the reader time to imagine what Tess is saying. Yet, Angel's confession is represented in a different way, to contrast deeply with hers:

...Clare went on:

'I did not mention it because I was afraid of endangering my chance of you, darling...I wonder if you will forgive me?'(pp.220-1)

After a direction by the narrator ('went on'), the character fully confesses his past mistakes through his own words, he can express what he really thinks, be excused for his acts, and so find purification. Tess, on the other hand can never talk openly about her past experiences, she can never be



fully understood by the reader, and this also because of the narrator's intermediacy.

This difference in the narrator's behaviour towards Tess is confirmed by another passage in the novel:

...[she] replied shyly:

'The trees have inquisitive eye, haven't they? -- that is, seem as if they had. And the river says "Why do ye trouble me with your looks?" And you seem to see numbers of to-morrows just all in a line, the first of them the biggest and clearest, the others getting smaller and smaller as they stand further away; but they all seem very fierce and cruel and as if they said, "I'm coming! Beware of me! Beware of me!"...But you, sir, can raise up dreams with your music, and drive all such horrid fancies away!' (p.128)

Tess's words appear here to be finally freed from any mediator's intervention, they are more thoughts than real spoken words, closer to the *stream of consciousness* technique than to the formal aspects of dialogues. Yet, when the woman has finished giving voice to her mind, we read:

He was surprised to find this young woman -- who though but a milkmaid had just that touch of rarity about her which might make her the envied of her housemates -- shaping such sad imaginings. She was expressing in her own native phrases...feelings which might almost have been called those of the age -- the ache of modernism (p.129).

Angel is here, in an interplay with the narrator, to comment upon Tess's speech. She becomes the representative of the 'modernist' era, a new period of uncertainties and sufferings, when the man, as well as the woman, can only rely upon himself to give sense to reality. Tess is left alone to attribute a meaning to those 'trees', 'rivers', 'tomorrows', to that 'music', which all animate her mind and

become her 'fancies'. Yet, she cannot be completely liberated in her mental speech, and the narrator tries, through the male Angel, to confine her again within the limits of a Victorian narrative tradition, that of an authorial narrative situation; Tess can talk without mediacy, but at the end our pre-modernist teller confirms his position, to secure her with a fixed label, and assure his reader of the reliability of his narration.<sup>9</sup>

A question spontaneously appears, and this is: why does not Angel Clare need as many interventions of mediacy as Tess does? Is it because of her being a woman? It may be so. The male characters of the novel appears to be simpler: John Durbeyfield is represented through his carelessness, and ironically called 'Sir' by the narrator; Mr Clare and Angel's two brothers are described more as types than individuals:

Old Mr Clare was a clergyman of a type which, within the last twenty years...(p.160)

After breakfast he walked with his two brothers, non-Evangelical, well-educated, hall-marked young men, correct to their remotest fibre...(p.162).

These characters seem, therefore, to come out of a novel by Trollope, Angel Clare appears to be defined by the irony about his name, Alec d'Urberville is the embodiment of the villain figure, almost disappearing behind his 'ghastly' laughs and 'red' cigars:<sup>10</sup>

He paused...then suddenly broke into horrible laughter -- as unnatural and ghastly as a laugh in hell(p.226)

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<sup>9</sup>For William Greenslade, *op. cit.*, '...Tess's plea...is against the determinism of the continuous effects of the hereditary taint...It is a radical affirmation of the autonomy of the self in the face of the stories which the genes are made to tell' (p.159).

<sup>10</sup> See F.B. Pinion, 'Mephistopheles, Satan, and Red Cigars', in *Thomas Hardy: Art and Thought*, (London, 1977).

The unexpectedness of his presence, the grotesqueness of his appearance in a gathered smockfrock, such as was now worn only by the most old-fashioned of the labourers, had a ghastly comicality that chilled her as to its bearing. D'Urberville emitted a low long laugh(p.336).

Yet, Tess is completely different:

Almost at a leap Tess thus changed from simple girl to complex woman(p.103)

Perfect, he, as a lover, might have called them [her lips] off-hand. But no: they were not perfect. And it was the touch of the imperfect upon the would-be perfect that gave the sweetness, because it was that which gave the humanity(p.153).

For the narrator she is a 'complex woman', and, therefore, cannot be easily defined, as he does with other characters. She is neither the beauty, nor the embodiment of physical perfection against moral imperfection, nor that of physical imperfection against moral perfection; she is human.

Of Tess, Angel says to Mrs Durbeyfield: "I know her better than you do"(p.362), and the woman replies: "That's very likely, sir; for I have never really known her"(p.362). Tess's mother has never understood her daughter, since they are too different to find any middle point of communication.<sup>11</sup> Yet, what Angel Clare believes he has understood is not Tess, the real person, but his own subjective impression of this woman. At the very beginning of the narrative, the narrator leaves his place to Angel, and through the use of 'free indirect speech', he is made to think:

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<sup>11</sup>'Between the mother...and the daughter...there was a gap of two hundred years as ordinarily understood. When they were together the Jacobean and the Victorian ages were juxtaposed', Thomas Hardy, *op. cit.*, p.28.

She was so modest, so expressive, she had looked so soft in her thin white gown that he felt he had acted stupidly(p.23).

Tess has appeared to Angel's eyes as a 'pure' girl,<sup>12</sup> 'soft' and docile in her whiteness. The man has been betrayed by a conventional cultural association of the colour 'white' to purity and innocence;<sup>13</sup> the reader does not know Tess yet at this early stage of the novel, nor does it Angel who has seen her for the first time at the dance. He has nevertheless already constructed his own interpretation of the girl.

The narrator further explains:

Tess was the merest stray phenomenon to Angel Clare as yet -- a rosy, warming apparition, which had only just acquired the attribute of persistence in his consciousness(p.133)

She was no longer the milkmaid, but a visionary essence of woman -- a whole sex condensed into one typical form(pp.134-5)

...as he gazed a moving spot intruded on the white vacuity of its perspective(p.371).

The woman is not a real being but only a 'visionary essence', a 'vacuity' to be filled by the man's images of whiteness and purity. She is not, but represents a 'rosy apparition', a temporary 'intruder' in Angel's 'consciousness. He cannot, therefore, understand her face, her physical aspect, this being a disconnected, an alien part of his personal image of the woman.

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<sup>12</sup>The subtitle 'A Pure Woman' was added only later by Hardy to contrast conventional Victorian moralism. For an interesting study on this subject, see Mary Jacobus, 'Tess's Purity', *Essays in Criticism*, 26, (1979), pp.318-38.

<sup>13</sup>The figure of the reddeleman in *The Return of the Native* comes here easily to mind. We may say that Hardy is trying to unsettle traditional cultural beliefs in moral and spiritual qualities. The value of certain colours like 'white' and 'red' are left ambiguous.

The second quotation presents a different point of view of the woman. She is 'no longer' the milkmaid Angel meets daily at work, but a product of his imagination and sexual fantasy. Tess is here, therefore, the man's ideal representation of female being: a 'whole sex', a 'visionary essence', that is an imaginary stereotyped form of woman.

The third of our quotations, then, refers to Angel's physical act of seeing Tess as a distant point on the horizon. Yet these words implies more than is explicitly manifested; the woman resembles a 'moving spot' in the male-structured universe of Angel Clare, she is insignificantly small and extraneous to that world. Tess, in fact, 'intrudes' on Angel's Victorian views of reality, made of categories and of a rigid separation between good and bad. She is seen as almost using violence to penetrate a place which does not belong to her, as she enters and occupies a 'white vacuity', that is an empty white space, ready to accept any illusionary 'visionary essence' which appears to be clean, pure enough to be heartily welcomed.

Clare regarded her attentively, coned the characters of her face as if they had been hieroglyphics (p.176).

As Clym, Wildeve, and Diggory Venn in *The Return* cannot decode Eustacia's personality, as Jude cannot understand Sue, so Angel Clare cannot *grasp* Tess's character. She is an 'apparition', not a real being for him, a rapid 'phenomenon' which only lasts, yet is changed in the man's 'consciousness'. She is 'rosy' and 'warming' because her image communicates to him a beautiful and long-awaited ideal: that of a perfect and saint-like being.

Tess is the only character in the novel to present such difficulties in definition. Her speech is mainly of the free indirect kind, as in the following examples:

How stupid he must think her! (p.131)

But whether Mr Clare had spoken seriously or not, why should she, who could never conscientiously allow any man to marry her now and who had religiously determined



that she never would be tempted to do so, draw off Mr Clare's attention from other women, for the brief happiness of sunning herself in his eyes while he remained at Talbothays?(p.141)

The use of free indirect speech or thought, with its deictic words, like 'here' and 'now', and the presence of exclamation and question marks brings the reader into the fictional world, and, therefore, into Tess's mind: from the narrator's point of view to the woman's one, from an *objective* narrative to a *subjective* one.

What we hear in the above quotations is, therefore, Tess's own voice: in the first she feels guilty of stupidity, she appears insecure in a world which is dominated by men and, therefore, makes her speechless. In the second extract from the novel, Tess's sense of guilt seems to come out again: she cannot 'conscientiously' and 'religiously' let Angel Clare court her and fall in love with her, because she is not pure enough for marriage.

A clear case of cultural influence on a woman's conscience and interpretations of life events is here evident. Tess feels guilty of some terrible act she has never been responsible for, the violence upon her has been transformed in her mind into personal impurity. The male rapist (Alec) has become innocent, whereas the victim (Tess) is spotted as blameable.<sup>14</sup>

How unexpected were the attacks of destiny. And if her father doubted her a little, would not neighbours and acquaintance doubt her much? O, she could not live long at home(p.252)

Could he have had it?...Could it be that her doubts were childish?...Had he really received her note?...It might be that he forgave her(p.208)

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<sup>14</sup>Whether it is rape or seduction remains an open question. See Kristin Brady, 'Tess and Alec: Rape or Seduction?', in *Thomas Hardy Annual* no.4, edited by Norman Page, (London, 1986), pp.127-47.

Ah -- now she knew what he was dreaming of; that Sunday morning when he had borne her along through the water with the other dairymaids... (p.243)

Was he going to drown her? Probably he was. ...He might drown her if he would: it would be better than parting to-morrow to lead severed lives (p.244)

Was he really indifferent? But was he ill? Was it for her to make some advance? (p.486)

In these lines Tess's interest is concentrated on probable observers of her acts. She does not feel free to choose her behaviour and life because of society's pressure and moral interpretation.<sup>15</sup> First her father, then her neighbours, finally her lover, Angel Clare, represent the several watchers Tess imagines to be controlling and judging her.

In the four quotations the woman is worried about Angel's ideal image of woman, about his receiving her note of confession, his indifference, his illness; she feels anxious about any possible interpretation of her acts as 'childish', and asks herself about what would be proper conduct; then she tries to foresee the man's probable reactions to the discovery of her past life. Once again the woman appears culturally dominated by male judgements, acts, and decisions: she believes in a man-centred society because she belongs to that world of categories and fixed rules. She has no other choice than to take place in the game of clear and defined distinctions between the sexes.

The following example is very interesting because, taken from an already late point in the story, it suggests Tess's need to believe in happiness again, to hope for something different from her 'destiny' in the after life:

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<sup>15</sup>Elliot B. Gose ('Psychic Evolution: Darwin and Imitation in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 18:3, (1963), pp.261-72), sees Tess not as a victim of society, but as a victim of history.

If she could only believe what the children were singing; if she were only sure, how different all would now be; how confidently she would leave them to Providence and their future kingdom! (p.344)

This character, more than others, is allowed to let the reader hear her voice, since the author feels the impossibility of a satisfying definition of the woman through the narrator's comments, summaries, and reports. Yet, at the same time, Tess appears to require more interventions of mediacy by the narrator. Here are some more examples:

His wife, she said to herself. Could it ever be? Their two selves together, nothing to divide them, every incident shared by them: why not? And yet why? (p.204)

Her first thought was, how would she be able to face her parents?...At sight of her father's chimney she asked herself how she could possibly enter the house? (p.249)

There is no contradiction between the two positions; Tess cannot be satisfactorily presented through an authorial voice, she is mainly left to her own, through the use of free indirect speech, yet the author is caught between his need to possess his own creation, by producing a sufficiently convincing description of a character, and his compulsion to approach reality by presenting the unpredictable. His female heroine is, therefore, the product of this alternation, with mixed forms of free indirect speech and teller's comments, or forms of direct speech usually directed by the narrator.

The only possible comment upon Tess is her undefined nature, and this can be exemplified by one of the many quotations which records her voices. Let us listen to her:

'I don't know -- I wish -- how can I say yes or no, when --' (p.74)

That the author, a male author, behaves differently with Tess, because of her being a woman, may be a possible answer;<sup>16</sup> yet Hardy's need to oppose the Victorian tendency to categorize women seems more at work here. He represents Tess as a fugitive being, as he had done with Eustacia in *The Return*, and will do with Sue's personality in *Jude*; and this is one of his strategies to communicate to his reader a true, because confused, image of reality.

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<sup>16</sup>For James Hazen ('Angel's Hellenism in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*', *College Literature*, 4 (1977), pp.129-35), the author shares many ideas and beliefs with Angel.

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## JUDE THE OBSCURE : A NOMADIC MIND

*Jude the Obscure* is the last of Thomas Hardy's novels; thereafter Hardy returned to poetry, which had always been his first love. With this work, the author seems to suggest a different fictional expression from his earlier narrative creations, he appears to communicate new images and symbols, and guide his readers towards an experimental novel.<sup>1</sup>

The idea of *Jude the Obscure* as an experimental fictional work is supported by particular changes in Hardy's construction of the narrative world -- and the word 'changes' strikes us at the very beginning of our reading;

The rector had gone away for the day, being a man who disliked the sight of changes<sup>2</sup>

'Ah, that a little maid should know such changes! (p.8)

The fictional world of *Jude the Obscure* opens with changes; the old teacher is leaving and a new teacher is going to replace him in the small Marygreen. This little and ordinary village is, eventually, ready to be submitted to alterations, whereas the world outside those last green fields has already begun to move restlessly.<sup>3</sup> The 'little maid' of the second quotation is Sue Bridehead, the central female character in the story, who has, earlier than anyone

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Schweik sees this novel 'at the forefront of three important developments in the history of Western art -- and "modern" in that way' (p.50), 'Modernity' of Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, in *A Spacious Vision*, edited by Phillip Mallett and Ronald P. Draper, (Penzance, 1994), pp.49-63.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, edited by Patricia Ingham, The World's Classics, (Oxford, 1985), p.3. References to the following quotations are given in brackets.

<sup>3</sup>For Hardy, agricultural life was precarious. In 'The Dorsetshire Labourer', which was published on *Longman's Magazine* (2, (1883), pp.252-69) he states that if some years before 'the majority remained all their lifetime on one farm', only a generation later 'the labourers...look upon an annual removal as the most natural thing in the world'. See *Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings*, edited by Harold Orel, (London, 1967), pp.181-2.



else, anticipated those changes, and, therefore, represents, together with Jude '...the modern vice of unrest' (p.85).

Different kinds of innovations can be seen in the narrative; (1) a different approach to the natural world with a slow but effective substitution of agricultural, rural occupations and activities with metropolitan interests, modern rhythms, and mental life; (2) a narrator who is less intrusive and omniscient, and appears able to share voices with the characters; and (3) a more sustained representation of symbols and images.

Unlike the preceding novels, *Jude the Obscure* presents a world in which nature has resigned its fundamental role as the ruler of human lives. We do not have the usual long descriptions of the physical natural environment, as in Hardy's earlier works, nor are the novel's first images those of an untouched and remote landscape, and its last survivors. The novel's first pages are full of objects and activities which do not belong to the agricultural tradition of Marygreen, despite the suggestion of its name, but to that of a 'town' life, which, further in the narrative, ironically rhymes with 'gown';

He began to see that the town life was a book of humanity infinitely more palpitating, varied, and compendious than the gown life (p.121),  
and represents, first, an intellectual and refined ideal, then, a hypocritical and dead existence.

Marygreen is, on the other hand, not only a place unable to offer its inhabitants any kind of comfort from the grimness of their poor and hard existence on the fields, but it is, also, regarded as 'ugly' by Jude, in a perpetual comparison with his dreamy vision of Christminster;

'How ugly it is here!' he murmured (p.8)

'Where is this beautiful city, aunt...?' (p.12)

Jude's jobs are all those of a town citizen; he works as a 'physician's agent',<sup>4</sup> as an itinerant bread-seller on his cart, which has been transformed into a 'private study',<sup>5</sup> as a 'stone-cutter' assistant,<sup>6</sup> a 'church-builder' assistant,<sup>7</sup> and later as an itinerant church-restorer.<sup>8</sup> The nomadic quality of his occupation is at odds with the sense of stability associated with agricultural activities, and even his first job on the fields is not related to the land work, as he is only a guardian there. When everything collapses, he courageously returns to his aunt's occupation, and with the saddest of ironies, he bakes cakes in the shape of Christminster windows, towers, and pinnacles.

Even a rural activity, like the killing of a pig, is not described as part of the natural seasonal routine, but becomes an episode of symbolic significance<sup>9</sup> in the life of the characters, and in the experience of the reader;

The animal's note changed its quality, It was not now rage, but the cry of despair; long-drawn, slow and hopeless(p.63)

However unworkmanlike the deed, it had been mercifully done. The blood flowed out in a torrent instead of in the trickling stream she had desired(p.64)

The white snow, stained with the blood of his fellow-mortal, wore an illogical look to him as a lover of

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<sup>4</sup>Thomas Hardy, *op. cit.*, p.24.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibidem*, p.28.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p.32.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p.32.

<sup>8</sup>Terry Eagleton stresses the 'productive creativity' of Jude's masonry. He writes in the Introduction to the New Wessex edition of *Jude*: 'It is in the labour of the Christminster working class that Hardy discovers an alternative to the decayed world of the dons...'

<sup>9</sup>A similar symbolic meaning of an animal like the pig, which represents the material aspects of life against a more spiritual and intellectual aspiration, can be found in *The Story of an African Farm* by Olive Schreiner (1883): '... with an adroit movement he inserted his leg between Waldo and the wall and sent him over into the pig-sty... The sudden reversal of the head and feet had thrown out the volume that Waldo carried in his breast' p.111. Olive Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm*, Penguin Classics edition, (London, 1986).

justice, not to say a Christian; but he could not see how the matter was to be mended(p.65).

These quotations refer to the moment of the pig's death. What older farmers could have easily done without the help of a pig-killer, cannot be successfully done by Jude, because of his mercy towards an animal, which only a generation before would have merely represented food and sustenance for the coming winter, but which now has become a 'fellow-mortal', and, like a human being, cries first for 'rage', then for 'despair', and ultimately shows its 'hopelessness'. Jude cannot do any harm to other animate beings, and we remember his unpleasant experience in the fields related to his merciful behaviour towards the birds;

...his heart grew sympathetic with birds' thwarted desires. They seemed, like himself, to be living in a world which did not want them(p.9).

His relation to the natural world appears, therefore, to be mediated by conscience and moral choices, his sensitivity towards nature reveals little of the spontaneous and selfish use made of it by an older generation of country people, or by men who, like the pseudo-physician Vilbert from Christminster, show '...no intellectual light...' (p.25), and use '...a distillation of the juices of doves' hearts -- otherwise pigeons...' (p.310), to produce some magic and expensive remedies.

Jude's mercy is, on one hand, counterbalanced by Arabella's practical and economical views, in the same episode of the pig;

'The meat must be well bled, and to do that he must die slow. We shall lose a shilling a score if the meat is red and bloody!' (p.63)

and, on the other hand, reinforced by Sue's impulsive decision to free the pigeons after they have been sold at an auction of their belongings;

...on passing the poulterer's shop, not far off, she saw her pigeons in a hamper by the door. An emotion at

the sight of them... caused her to act on impulse, and first looking around her quickly, she pulled out the peg which fastened down the cover, and went on. The cover was lifted from within, and the pigeons flew away with a clatter that brought the chagrined poulterer cursing and swearing to the door(p.323),

a symbolic representation, this, of her similarity to her lover (Jude) and their dissimilarity to the rest of the people in the story, elsewhere more openly manifested;<sup>10</sup>

'We are horribly sensitive; that's really what's the matter with us, Sue!' he declared(p.300)

'We are a little beforehand, that's all'(p.301)

That complete mutual understanding, in which every glance and movement was as effectual as speech for conveying intelligence between them, made them almost the two parts of a single whole(p.306)

...the neighbourhood generally did not understand, and probably could not have been made to understand, Sue and Jude's private minds, emotions, positions, and fears(p.313)

'People don't understand us,' he sighed heavily(p.321).

Another indication of the distance of the fictional characters from the rural world and its implications is revealed by the predominance, in the first chapter, of objects which are neither products nor instruments of an agricultural community but the result of rather metropolitan

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<sup>10</sup>A lot has already been written on Sue and Jude's relationship. Hardy is likely to have chosen to describe the love story of two cousins for more than one reason; they might have represented his way to oppose current views on consanguinity in marriage and related degeneration of the race. For Hardy's contemporary opinions on the subject, see George H. Darwin, 'Marriages between First Cousins in England and their Effects', *Fortnightly Review*, vol.XVIII, (1875), pp.22-41.

interests, acts, performances, and work. The school, the church, the piano, and the roads, which link Marygreen to other places, are all constructions of men; they represent man's ability to create things because of his own mental, intellectual, and spiritual possibilities.

Words like 'school-master', 'teacher', 'school-house', 'managers', 'master' and 'rector' all suggest a kind of hierarchy which is largely unknown in the rural world presented in Hardy's preceding novels. New interests and occupations have substituted the seasonal work on the fields, and the 'piano' strikes us here as a symbol of that refined and polished world idealized by Jude, and that never-ending 'enthusiasm' for one's own ideal.

As for the characters, they are not presented through associations with the natural world, but through their own characteristics as human beings;

...everybody seemed sorry(p.3)

But the enthusiasm having waned he had never acquired any skill in playing, and the purchased article had been a perpetual trouble to him ever since in moving house(p.3)

A little boy of eleven...spoke up, blushing at the sound of his own voice...Tears rose into the boy's eyes, for he was not among the regular day scholars, who came unromantically close to the schoolmaster's life...indisposed to any enthusiastic volunteering of aid(pp.3-4)

...on her mantelpiece the photograph of a pretty girlish face, in a broad hat, with radiating folds under the brim like the rays of a halo(p.78).

The first quotation defines the villagers' mood at the leaving of the schoolmaster, but it is, at the same time, the expression of their daily attitude towards life in a



'small sleepy place'<sup>11</sup> like Marygreen. The second quotation gives us a first glimpse of Mr Phillotson, as a mature man who has lived through a life of 'enthusiasm' and ideals, which are now fading, yet still tries to follow his last unfulfilled dream of Christminster, by moving towards that lighted town.

The following quotation presents Jude, as a boy of eleven -- this being a novelty in Hardy, who has usually presented his characters in an already mature age. He is, at the beginning of the story, a super-sensitive boy, as his son Little Father Time will be further on in the narrative,<sup>12</sup> and already possesses an exceptional tendency to notice particulars of life experience which ordinary people lack. In the present quotation he distinguishes himself for his not being a 'regular day scholar', and, therefore, different from the others, who are emotionally unmoved by the sudden leaving of their schoolmaster.

The last quotation, then, introduces Sue by means of a very recurrent symbolic image, that of an 'halo'. Her photograph and the value it has for Jude are a perfect reminder of another portrait, that of Jude and its opposite value for a woman like Arabella, who has sold it in order to get some money from it. Yet, the 'halo' is a much more impressive expression which suggests two things; first Jude's idealization of the woman, who becomes saint-like to his eyes, and secondly, but not in importance, the presence of a diffused light which denies the possibility of grasping the truth about Sue's personality. We read throughout the novel;

...he felt that he did not even now quite know her mind(p.175)

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<sup>11</sup>Thomas Hardy, *op. cit.*, p.5.

<sup>12</sup>For Elaine Showalter, Jude's child is the representation of the monstrosity of nature due to a degenerate sexuality. See Elaine Showalter, 'Syphilis, Sexuality and the Fiction of the Fin de Siècle', in *Sex, Politics, and Science in the Nineteenth-Century Novel*, edited by R.B. Yeazel, (Baltimore and London, 1986), pp.88-115.

...and whatever she had meant to say remained unspoken(p.182)

Her actions were always unpredictable...(p.183)

...her curious double nature...(p.219)

'...you are ridiculously inconsistent!'(p.222)

'...her exact feeling for him [Jude] is a riddle to me...She is one of the oddest creatures I [Mr. Phillotson] ever met'(p.240)

'...She' s one too many for me!'(p.241)

'It is very inconsistent of you to...'(p.255).

Another reason for the definition of *Jude the Obscure* as an experimental novel among Hardy's narrative works, is the absence of the idea of nature as the main cause for human ruin and death. Whereas in other fictional stories by the same author it is natural to associate some of the characters' deaths to Nature and weather, in this novel this connection does not work, and death appears to be an entirely human matter. Let us read some words from the novel;

As he [Jude] passed the end of the church she [Sue] heard his coughs mingling with the rain on the windows...(p.412)

Despite himself , Jude recovered somewhat, and worked at his trade for several weeks. After Christmas, however, he broke down again(p.421)

'A little water, please.'...Nothing but the deserted room received his appeal, and he coughed to exhaustion...(p.426).

They are all quotations regarding Jude's illness and final death. Though the first quotation may indicate an accordance between Jude's illness and rain, this is the only passage suggesting such a meaning for his death. The following quotations, in fact, show how strenuously he has decided to die, now that he has lost his well-beloved ideals. Jude has recovered against his will, but, then, he achieves his death, and his last words in asking for some water appear an ironic reference to the last words spoken by Jesus Christ on Mount Calvary. The man called Jude who has never betrayed his love for Sue, not even his birds, as a child, has been condemned by his ideals and visionary dreams, and dies like Jesus, whom he calls 'his exemplar',<sup>13</sup> amidst the carelessness of an indifferent world.

*Jude the Obscure* presents another peculiarity which distinguishes it from earlier novels by Hardy; the different role played by the narrator. In previous works this narrative voice appears very often to be predominant upon the fictional world he describes, though there are some moments when the narrator seems to be at a loss in his understanding of the characters' behaviours and thoughts. It is precisely this lack of understanding that is emphasized in *Jude the Obscure*, where we see the narrator standing apart, at a certain distance from his characters.

The following are some examples of the narrator's intervention in the narrative;

During the three or four succeeding years...In the course of a month or two...(p.28)

The last pages to which the chronicler of these lives would ask the reader's attention are concerned with the scene in and out of Jude's bedroom when leafy summer came round again(p.425).

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<sup>13</sup>Thomas Hardy, *op. cit.*, p.134.

In the first quotation the narrator's words confirm his detachment from the story and his uncertainty about the happening, as he were a character himself. This passage is taken from the very beginning (Chapter v, Part first), and our story's narrator does not know how much time has passed between the closing of the previous chapter and this new one. The second passage quotes exactly the beginning of the last chapter, and it sounds quite strange at our reading. In a novel like *Jude the Obscure*, where almost everything seems to have been left to the characters' dialogues, and to the reader's subjective understanding and interpretations, these words represent an odd exception. The narrator, though absent throughout the development of the story, appears suddenly here to remind us of his presence. He introduces the final scene of his dramatic play to the reader, and, as if drawing the stage-curtains, he invites him to watch this last act.

As I said before, most of the narrative is left to the characters through their dialogues, where we can notice very little mediation from the narrator's side. And most of the novel's dialogues are between the two main characters Jude and Sue, though they are represented in a different way. Jude, in fact, is a much more defined character than the woman, who appears, as I noticed before, 'inconsistent', unpredictable, almost a 'riddle', both for the other characters and the reader.<sup>14</sup> I do not want to discuss the reason for her inconsistent characterization, in this chapter, for this would need a separate essay, yet we may say that her detached presentation by the narrator, who is undoubtedly a male narrator, and her relation to the male novel's characters each provide a great deal of material for discussion upon man and woman relationships, love, and marriage.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Ian Fletcher sees Sue's character as 'a new type of woman, the *névrose*, the modern hysteric'. See *Introduction to British Poetry and Prose: 1870-1905*, (Oxford, 1987), xvii.

<sup>15</sup>In 1975 Mary Jacobus directed critical attention away from the male character Jude with her essay 'Sue the Obscure', *Essays in Criticism*, 25, (1975), pp.304-328).

The two characters, Jude and Sue, are seen as

...two parts of a single whole(p.306),

and

...they both converged towards the cross-mark at the same moment(p.101),

though they are very different, for they say;

'..I [Jude] care for something higher...And I for something broader, truer' she insisted(p.156),

where the words 'higher', 'broader', and 'truer' are fundamental. These, actually, synthesize their opposite movements in the process of their life's ideal goals; whereas, therefore, Jude aspires to ascend intellectually and socially -- his going up and down the staircases in the story's houses, or his moving northwards and southwards from one town to another are good examples for this -- Sue desires 'truer' relationships with the representatives of her opposite sex, in the sense of a deeper mutual understanding, beyond a mere sexual intercourse.

At the end of the novel, then, they are described in these words;

Sue and himself had mentally travelled in opposite directions since the tragedy: events which had enlarged his own views of life, laws, customs, and dogmas, had not operated in the same manner on Sue's. She was no longer the same as in the independent days, when her intellect played like lambent lightning over conventions and formalities which he at that time respected, though he did not now(p.363).

Here the speaker appears to be the narrator, yet, the use of 'himself' betrays the presence of Jude and we may read the

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Since then this female character has become the focus of critical interests; see, for example, Penny Boumelha, *op. cit.*.



passage as one of Jude's self-justifications for his separation from Sue. They have 'travelled in different directions', he thinks, he against, and she towards 'conventions' and 'formalities', and he has become what Sue had been before;

He was mentally approaching the position which Sue had occupied when he first met her(p.326).

The use of the expression 'travelled', in the precedent quotation, seems to have been intentionally chosen, for other words, like 'moved', for instance, could have been used to suggest the idea of movement. Yet, here the movement is associated with a wish to discover life, the knowledge of new worlds and new selves. Therefore, we read;

'I [Jude] was, perhaps, after all, a paltry victim to the spirit of mental and social restlessness, that makes so many unhappy in these days!' (p.345)

This movement is never-ending, and does not give happiness. It is not a *pilgrim's progress* towards full knowledge of the mysteries of the world and of oneself, but it is only a 'restless' and mechanical modern movement to '...a chaos of principles...' (p.345), and nowhere.

The third main innovation we find in *Jude the Obscure* regards a more conscious use of symbolic images and words; one of the most recurrent words being 'spot', and one of the most frequent images that of a 'circle'.

As I said, 'spot' is a very frequent word in the narrative; it is sometimes associated to a geographical place, but at the same time used in its figurative meaning, as when we read;

Then they bore off to the left along the crest into the ridgeway, which they followed till it intersected the high-road at the Brown House aforesaid, the spot of his former fervid desires to behold Christminster(p.42)

It was not till now, when he found himself actually on the spot of his enthusiasm, that Jude perceived how far

away from the object of that enthusiasm he really was(p.86)

...a spot which to Jude was irresistible -- though to Sue it was not so fascinating -- a narrow lane close to the back of a college, but having no communication with it(p.347).

'Spot' is, therefore the place of Jude's 'desires', 'enthusiasm', and, though it can be identified in the city of Christminster, it is mainly a place in his mind, a place of harmony and peace. Let us read the novel, again;

It had been the yearning of his heart to find something to anchor on, to cling to -- for some place which he could call admirable. Should he find that place in this city if he could get there?(p.21)

The answer to his question and quest for an 'admirable place' is negative, and the 'spot' will be '...the spot of the martyrdoms' (p.101), '[a] Calvary' (p.108), once he has realized the impossibility of reaching it.

Another connotation for the same recurrent word is offered by the following quotations;

...walking past the spots she frequented(p.99)

In his misery and depression Jude walked to well-nigh every spot in the city that he had visited with Sue... (p.394).

Here the 'spot' is a place in the memory; the place of Jude's past and love. In their restless movement, therefore, Jude and Sue revisit the same 'spots', which are both mental and geographical places, belonging to their past, present, and future lives, being this movement endless. Jude says; 'My good heavens -- how we are changing places!' (p.366), where the word 'places' indicates Sue's sudden and frequent changes of mind, and, at the same time, their nomadic life.

To get there and live there, to move among the churches and halls and become imbued with the *genius loci*, had seemed to his dreaming youth, as the spot shaped its charms to him from its halo on the horizon, the obvious and ideal thing to do(p.118).<sup>16</sup>

This passage is a good example of the connection between the frequent use of words indicating location and the symbolic circular images in the novel. Christminster, which is the place for excellence in Jude's mind, and represents his main dream of intellectual and cultural superiority, is represented in the same form of 'halo' used for the representation of Sue.<sup>17</sup> They are both Jude's ideals, and complementary at the same time; that is, he can only aspire to a full understanding of Sue by penetrating that scholarly world, and can only be sustained in his ascension by his love for her. It is like a magnetic spire, since he cannot achieve one without the other.

Another quotation with the same kind of association between the lighted town and the symbolic image of a 'circle' is given by the following words;

...there arose on Jude's sight the circular theatre...as the symbol of his abandoned hopes...(p.342).

Here, the 'circular theatre' is a representation of those 'abandoned hopes' Jude had projected upon his move to Christminster, which has been the embodiment of '...a unique centre of thought and religion...' (p.115).

'Spot', 'movement', 'circularity', and 'centre', appear, therefore, to be the key words for a symbolic understanding of the novel. The places dominate the narrative, even its formal division in sixth parts, each of them with a name of

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<sup>16</sup>See other passages: 'Jude, throwing a last adoring look at the distant halo, turned and walked...', Thomas Hardy, *op. cit.*, p.21; 'By moving to a spot a little way off he uncovered the horizon in a north-easterly direction. There actually rose the faint halo, a small dim nebulousness, hardly recognizable save by the eye of faith', *ibidem*, p.74.

<sup>17</sup>'...on her mantelpiece the photograph of a pretty girlish face, in a broad hat, with radiating folds under the brim like the rays of a halo', *ibid.*, p.78.

geographical location, introduced by the preposition *at*. Yet, the novel is not one of stasis but, on the contrary, one of continuous and endless movement.

This movement is well represented by Sue's 'tossing' in bed,<sup>18</sup> or by Jude's travel from the southern Marygreen to the northernmost of all localities in Hardy's Wessex, Christminster. His ascension is very symbolic, but it is not definitive; he goes *down* to Marygreen again, and would agree with Phillotson's words:

It was a last resource -- a small thing to return to after my move upwards, and my long indulged hopes -- a returning to zero, with all its humiliations(p.334).

A 'returning to zero' to start the same mechanical movement towards north once again, to the *high* Christminster, where he tries to penetrate its 'centre', and possess it, in a sort of substitution for the possession of a woman;

...Jude and his wife...were in lodgings on the top floor of a house nearer to the centre of the city(p.406)

With the money he had earned he shifted his lodgings to a yet more central part of the town(p.421).

Jude manages to grasp neither the 'centre' of the town, nor the woman he loves; he is denied that promised harmony of a satisfying and complete knowledge both of the world and the female body. He wishes not to live in a world of carelessness, absence, and loneliness,<sup>19</sup> he has directed all his efforts towards an ideal centre, which is man's potential ability to understand himself, as he seems to point out, as a child;

As you got older, you felt yourself to be the centre of your time, and not at a point in its circumference,

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<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p.97.

<sup>19</sup>There are many references to *solitude* and *carelessness* in the novel. See, for instance, *ibid.*, pp.137, 185, 280, and 369.

as you had felt when you were little, you were seized with a sort of shuddering, he perceived(p.13). He has failed in his discovery,<sup>20</sup> and renounces his life, in the same way he had wished not to grow up when he was younger, and his son, Little Father Time does in a more courageous way. We read;

If he could only prevent himself growing up!...He did not want to be a man(p.13).

The sense of circularity is, therefore, well diffused throughout the novel, suggesting that denied harmony and that perfect world, which Jude, like any other man, aspires to. Though the idea of a circle is source for various symbolic meanings -- *completeness*, because a circle is a closed line; *freedom*, because each part of it has the same value -- they all convey the same image of perfection, which is yet found not in regularity but in *irregularity*:

He...looked round among the new traceries, mullions, transoms, shafts, pinnacles, and battlements, standing on the bankers half worked, or waiting to be removed. They were marked by precision, mathematical straightness, smoothness, exactitude: there in the old walls were the broken lines of the original idea; jagged curves, disdain of precision, irregularity, disarray(p.85).

In this quotation the author synthesizes two opposite aesthetic values; an old but richly human irregularity contrasted with a new mechanical perfection. Jude, Hardy, and the other characters in his novels are aspiring to that older idea of the full life, which is exemplary and symbolized in a circle, or circumference throughout the pages of *Jude the Obscure*. The figure of the policeman itself,<sup>21</sup> who from time to time appears in the narrative to

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<sup>20</sup>For Robert Schweik, *op. cit.*, : 'Jude's gradually diminishing aspirations' represents 'the most powerful of the formal devices Hardy used to create the sense of unresolved open-endedness...' (p.52).

<sup>21</sup>See Thomas Hardy, *op. cit.*, pp.29, 81, 97, 120, 311, 346, and 414.



embody order, stability, and respect for the rules of law, represents the oppressive, dominating, and authoritarian presence of a mechanical and repetitive regularity.

Jude will never achieve this perfection, despite his restless movements, for he moves *to and fro* along the same line:

Moreover he perceived that at best only copying, patching, and imitating went on here... (p.85).

The modern man can only imitate a past regular perfection, the modern machine can only reproduce the work of Gothic architecture, just as Jude tries, yet without positive results, to reconcile his nineteenth-century life with a synthesizing harmonic circularity.

## CONCLUSION

As this study has shown, Hardy's novels are expression of the author's refusal to label reality in definite and fixed terms.

In Victorian times people felt the urgent need to classify and categorize almost everything around them, as a sort of reaction to profound changes in their world. They were eager to express their judgments about every anormal form of behaviour or life choice; scientists, in particular, used to represent reality by way of a rigid classification, with an oppressive distinction between what was within and what beyond the boundaries of normality.

Femininity, homosexuality, infancy, madness and criminality represented, for the Victorians, only one expression of natural difference from the normal behaviour which conventionality imposed upon them. Women were different because weaker than men in their physical characteristics: their blessed gift to give birth and be mothers entailed the sacrifice of all their other potential activities and interests. To become wives and mothers was for most conventional Victorian women enough, and one of the best ways to contribute to the good of the English nation. Other attitudes from those which could find expression in the home were defined as disruptive and the origin of a kind of degeneration of the English race.

In the same category of women, at the margins of society, homosexuals and children could find their places. These were, like Victorian women, seen as useless on a practical layer; homosexuality was considered as a degeneration from manhood, whose virility required fixed and well-defined conventional characteristics. If man was called to help, protect and guide, women, children and homosexuals had to be helped, protected and guided by him.

The same destiny was reserved to mad people, as they were then called, and criminals, both too often associated as two distinctive expressions of a common natural deficiency. Robbery, murder, hysteria, venereal diseases, prostitution, sterility, poverty and mental insanity belonged all to the same class, whose analysis had been left in the hands of men of science. And science had found reasons for all these different behaviours in nature.

Nature, therefore, was the answer to the great variety of people's lives. Women, for instance, were naturally different from men: in the form and size of their brains, in their physiological structures and, consequently, in their psychological attitudes and purposes. They were exclusively doomed to the care of children and of the home, which had become, for the husbands, the safest refuge from an antagonistic outer world. The only alternative to respectable marriage was prostitution, not a completely dissimilar occupation, based on sacrifice and deprecation of one's self and body.

Nature and not culture was the key to Victorian scientific analyses; ideas of superiority and domination, which had been culturally constructed in the world's long history through people's discourses of interpretation of reality, had, in Victorian times, become the reality itself. What had been originated as a partial vision and personal viewpoint of a world in continuous change, had been transformed in the ultimate and definite word on reality.

Thomas Hardy distinguished himself as an author who, in such a context, tried to put an end to a too easy generalization upon his contemporary world. Through his major novels he left an understated message of freedom from a division of reality into rigid categories, and denied what the century was stating.

He communicated to his readers an uncertain interpretation of life by means of a personal strategy, which took different forms in his different novels; an image of duality in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, the representation of his main

characters' uniqueness in *The Return of the Native* (Eustacia), in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (Tess), in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (Henchard), and a spasmodic use of symbols in *Jude the Obscure*.

Each chapter of this work has analysed a different novel by Hardy: *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, *The Return of the Native*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*. The first of these, which is not a narrative work largely recognized among the major fictional expressions of the author, has served as a perfect example of how Hardy's world appears divided into a double dimension. The second chapter, in fact, has been named 'Duality of Vision', to focus the reader's attention upon both a double construction of the novel's narrative and the representation of the contrasting personalities of the characters. The novel thus appears as the representation of a world whose image is that of a mirror; a double reality, made of contrasting and sometimes opposite components.

Elfride and Stephen's love story first, then Elfride and Henry's, have been described as reflected mirror images but reversed, opposed. If in the young couple the woman had dominated her lover, the second of Elfride's loves seems to present the opposite situation of the girl's subjection to the older and mature man. Yet the two love stories exemplify only the most visible aspect of this sense of duality, which is represented everywhere in the novel: from the superfluous presence of the 'twin girls', the loss of the 'two earrings', the 'two wives' of Lord Luxellian and their similar deaths, to the narrative construction of parallel episodes through irrational and mysterious acts of pre-vision and dreams.

Throughout this early novel by Hardy, therefore, the word duality has provided keys to our reading; the world of *A Pair of Blue Eyes* is a double reality, where everything can be its opposite, as in a reflecting mirrored image. Each interpretation or vision of the world meets its exact contrary to signify Hardy's central denial of a single and

universal standpoint. Reality can be interpreted in many subjective and often contrasting ways: our author seems to be suggesting this idea. In this light every episode, dialogue, act and symbol acquires a full significance; a duality of vision seems to permeate the whole narrative construction and give the novel's reader a complete and deliberate key of interpretation of this fictional world.

The third chapter of this work is devoted to *The Return of The Native*, an already mature novel by our author. Here there is no use of 'dualisms' but the representation of the main female character of Eustacia Vye as unique. I have chosen to concentrate on the woman and not on Clym Yeobright, because she has seemed to me to be expressing the main of Hardy's reactions to Victorian categories in the novel: the male character, in fact, appears more to have been created by the author to build up a contrast to Eustacia.

Throughout the story Eustacia is watched by different observers on the narrative scene: the narrator, a 'cosmopolitan narrator', as I have called a voice in between the story's narrator and the author, the male characters of the novel, an imaginative observer, the community of Egdon, and finally herself. Each of these pairs of eyes becomes the expression of a different point of view on the woman, of an attempt at enclosing her into a rigid and definite category.

Yet, if every watcher interprets Eustacia's personality in a personal and fully subjective way, if any interpretation is different and often contrasting with the others, then the woman seems not to be really understood. Hardy's strategic use of simultaneous and opposite viewpoints on a female character has appeared here to communicate the impossibility of defining, categorizing, and fixing people into rigid Victorian categories.

The following chapter analyses Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, focusing our attention on a male character, this time: Michael Henchard. If Eustacia is presented in *The*



Return through different points of view, Henchard becomes the representation of a man who does not correspond to the Victorian standard. His character, in fact, denies any nineteenth-century belief in a rigid division between bad and good; morality comes to represent neither a certainty nor a fixed category.

If the strategy in *The Return* had been that of a shifting perspective, with an outspoken refusal to suggest a coherent and fixed image of reality, in this novel Hardy alternates two opposite narrative techniques to this same end. In *The Mayor*, in fact, an authorial narrator is from time to time substituted by the characters' direct voices, creating a double fictional situation. Hardy's different linguistic choices, therefore, cause a different response from the reader, who is sometimes attracted within the story, becoming a participant, sometimes left outside the narration as a mere spectator.

The alternation between an 'authorial' and a 'figural' narrative situation presented in *The Mayor* is again used by Hardy in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, where *mimesis* -- which corresponds to a fictional freedom of the story's characters, alternates with *diegesis* -- which represents the novel's narrator intruding upon the characters. After a female character in *The Return* (Eustacia), and a male character in *The Mayor* (Henchard), the author here focuses his attention and devotion on another woman: Tess, his most famous fictional heroine.

And Hardy tries in this novel to unsettle the Victorian world again by giving his readers the image of a woman who does not correspond to his contemporaries' female ideal. Eustacia had signified a reaction to an easy categorization and definition of reality through a multiplicity of points of view; Henchard had represented a heroic destruction of moral limits and boundaries; Tess becomes the author's attempt at writing in defence of a woman.

I have not concentrated my analysis on Tess's personality because this has already been done in an exhaustive way by

more authoritative works than mine. I have, therefore, focused the chapter on the alternation between mimesis and diegesis, with the discovery of a large freedom left to male characters against a more frequent intervention by the narrator in the case of Tess. This lack of equality in the narrator's treatment of female and male characters may constitute an interesting point left to future analyses and discussions.

In the last chapter of this work I have analysed Hardy's last novel; *Jude the Obscure*. Our author's strategy is here represented by a symbolic choice of images, words, and recurrences: the words 'spot', 'circle', and 'centre', which are very frequently used in the book, seem to refer to the endless spiritual pilgrimage of the main male character of the story. As I had done in *The Return* with Eustacia, I have chosen here to focus my analysis on Jude and not on Sue, though the most recent critical works have concentrate their attention on the woman; Jude, in fact, has appeared to me Hardy's main key to unsettle his contemporary world.

I have, furthermore, defined this novel as 'experimental', because it appears to be presenting a completely different narrative pattern; and this for a series of reasons. First of all, a new use of the setting which is neither rural nor provincial but *metropolitan*, with all the consequences of a growing sense of modern alienation; secondly, the co-presence of both the narrator's and the characters' voices which seem to fuse the two distinct narrative situations (the 'authorial' and the 'figural') in only one indistinct and original pattern. Finally the spasmodically recurrent use of symbolic images and words to suggest Jude's unfulfilled and betrayed existence.

With his last novel, therefore, Hardy appears to be reaching a climax of reactions to late-Victorian society: from a juvenile narrative of 'doubles' (*A Pair*), to an already mature representation of multiple points of view in *The Return*, to an alternation of different and contrasting narrative patterns in some of his major novels (*The Mayor*,

*Tess*), to finally an obsessive and almost surrealistic choice of symbolic images in *Jude the Obscure*.

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